

THE  
BUDDHA'S  
TEACHING  
AND THE  
AMBIGUITY  
OF  
EXISTENCE

r.g.de s.wettimuni



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# THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING

## AND THE AMBIGUITY OF EXISTENCE



R. G. de S. Wettimuny



M. D. GUNASENA & CO., LTD.



To the memory of the late

Venerable **Ñānavira Thera** (of Bundala, Hambantota)

who showed me

many important things.



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## FOREWORD

THIS important work by Ramsay Wettimuny is published posthumously over three years after his untimely death. This book, like his previous publications, is the result of a habit he had of noting down and putting into writing the knowledge and insights he gained in the course of his practice and studies in the Dhamma. He did this for a number of reasons. It helped him to clarify his own thinking and it was also his desire to share his knowledge and experience with a wider public. Much of the progress he had made in his religious life is reflected in the knowledge contained here, which he valued very much, and wanted to see in print for the benefit of those who were seeking a deeper insight into the Dhamma. I am aware that prior to his death he had discussions with his printers and publishers and made arrangements for the publication of this book. With his sudden death we had a fear that his wish may not materialise. We should be grateful to the members of his family for respecting his wishes and seeing this work through the press, though I know that this has involved a great deal of labour and expense to them.

At the time of his death, the first few chapters of the book had already been sent to the printers. Most of the other chapters were also complete. Only Chapters XIV and XVI still remained in draft. It was, however, possible to complete these two chapters after collating the relevant material found in his notes. The whole of the material in this book came from his pen and it faithfully reproduces his thought, style and language, without alteration or editing. It can therefore be truly said that this book constitutes his work.

There is a crying need among the serious students of the Dhamma for books of this type—books that go beyond the mere superficial and seek to penetrate and reach the essential meaning of the Buddha's Teaching. This book cannot be compared with the general run of books on Buddhism and should stand in a class by itself with a few other works which have challenged the superficial views of the Dhamma so popular today. Accordingly, this book will run the risk of being considered unorthodox,



but it would be so regarded only by those who probably for the lack of something more adequate have accepted as orthodox some current misinterpretations of the **Suttas** (Discourses). To them, to a large extent, this book would undoubtedly be strange and unfamiliar. But, in truth, the author has made no claim to offer ideas never heard of before. He seems to adhere faithfully to the **Suttas**. We find here an intelligent discussion of the main topics of the Dhamma with reference to the pristine teaching as contained in the authentic discourses of the Buddha and his senior disciples. There is great depth in his thinking and the author has sought the true meaning of the Discourses without taking it second hand from popular exegetical literature.

I would commend this material to all persons sincerely interested in the Dhamma and ask them to judge it on its merits. The book is certainly less easy than it appears. It seems to proceed at an inner level of reflexive experience and demands a great deal of "self penetrative" thinking. But the attempt is worthwhile. However difficult it may be at the start, one should persevere in reading and trying to understand what the author is trying to express. For, given the necessary effort, one may chance on some insight or statement contained in these pages that may well spark off or provide the beginning for a real understanding of the Dhamma. This work was the result of more than a decade of hard and persistent thinking on that subject and deserves our consideration. Mr. Wettimuny was attracted to the Dhamma from his young days and, in the later stages of his life, he practically gave up worldly activities and devoted himself entirely to the Dhamma. His sincerity was undoubted and his familiarity with the Pali text of the **Suttas** was such that he could rightly be called *bahussuta*—one with extensive knowledge. He had in addition a first class mind which, if any credentials are necessary, seems to be borne out also by his educational and professional records. To a perceptive reader this book should give an indication of the range of his knowledge and of his powers of thinking and exposition.

It seems to me that, in writing this book, the author did not have the mere scholar in mind. It was not meant to be just an intellectual or scholarly exercise in speculative philosophy. He



addressed it primarily to those who were disquieted by existential questions and sought a solution to the ambiguity of existence. In my view, some familiarity with the existential philosophers of the West, particularly Heidegger and Sartre, could be profitable to one trying to understand the Teaching of the Buddha as set out herein, for they can clear the ground of some misconceptions and place one at an advantage in making a start on the **Suttas**. Indeed, one is surprised to find, in the writings of these philosophers certain similarities in the concepts, ideas, and language to those found in the **Suttas**. But, a word of caution is necessary. In resorting to such outside authorities, one must bear in mind that they can never be a substitute for the Buddha's Teaching. An acquaintance with the original Pali texts seems necessary for making real progress in the Dhamma, for nearly all translations are misleading or inadequate. Another requisite is that one should think and ponder on what one learns and try to see it in one's own experience. This exposition could be of immense value to the earnest searcher after the Truth. Certain areas of the Teaching which may have remained a mystery to him for so long could suddenly become clear and meaningful in the light of what is found here. With the dawning of the realisation that it is the Dhamma alone which is Truth and Actuality, his very life could undergo a transformation and he may find his accustomed ways of thought and attitudes being reversed. Therefore, this book ought to provide a vital nutrition to those who are in search of a solution to the problem of *dukkha*, but, unlike other nutritions, a nutrition that may threaten to denourish his entire being and yet make him happily say to himself: "Here, there is no turning back." The Dhamma, as we know, has this characteristic of leading on—*opanaiko*.

Such I consider to be the value of this book and all those who succeed in following this exposition would be indebted to the author for presenting the Dhamma in its true light. He expresses himself clearly and forcefully, so forcefully in fact that some may view his criticisms as being a little too harsh. Mr. Wettimuny was a compassionate and gentle person, and it was not in his nature to hurt others. He also had the greatest veneration for the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. If he has



declared his views in an outspoken manner, it is because he was convinced that the pure and pristine Teaching of the Blessed One had, in the course of time, got clouded and choked by wrong views, and he thought that it was his duty to dispel these views in no unmistakable terms.

Those who have read and understood his previous book, "The Buddha's Teaching—Its Essential Meaning," will, after reading this book, realise how much more knowledgeable, articulate, and sure-footed he is here. We, who knew him, noted his phenomenal development during the last phase of his life. His untimely death, when he was at the height of his intellectual powers, is a tragedy to all of us, particularly to his family and close friends.

To strike a personal note, it is a privilege for me to write this foreword in remembrance of Ramsay Wettimuny and to repay even in a small measure the great debt I owe him. I well remember those long sessions, often ending in the small hours of the morning, when day after day, a few of us who looked to him for guidance, heard him expound the Dhamma in his own inimitable manner. Looking back, I find that this was during a period when I had the misfortune to encounter a great deal of stress and worry in my working life. But, despite this, I can well count that period as the most rewarding in my whole life. My association with him not only helped me to tide over those troubles, which became petty and insignificant when seen in the proper perspective, but it also proved a great gain to me, for it enabled me to secure some understanding of this priceless Teaching from him.

I have little doubt that the Dhamma in which he took steadfast refuge, and which he knew so well, will ensure that the progress he achieved here, on his upward march, will not be lost. May he attain NIBBANA.

R. S. WANASUNDERA  
Judge of the Supreme Court

12th August, 1977



## PREFACE

THIS book might appear unorthodox. Yet it will appear unorthodox only to those who—possibly for want of something more adequate—have accepted as orthodox the current misinterpretations of those Pali Suttas (i.e. Discourses) which are accepted as representing what the Buddha taught. To them this book will, to a large extent, be something new. But it makes no claim to offer ideas never heard of before. Indeed no. What it claims to offer is the pristine Teaching as contained in these Suttas. This Teaching, the Dhamma, is like a ferment. Yet much depends on what it works upon—whether it works upon the lifeless ideational activity of the scholar or upon the passionately interested meditation of the seeker. To the former it is just another intellectual adornment, with which he can adorn himself as and when it pleases him. To the latter it is a vital nutrition (*ahara*); but, unlike other nutritions, a nutrition that threatens to denourish his entire being, and yet make him happily say to himself: Here, there is no turning back.

It may be said that some of the criticisms appearing in this book are too forth right or even harsh. We could quite easily soften or omit the passages concerned. But one of the purposes of the book—though certainly not the primary purpose—is to clear away a mass of dead matter that is choking the Suttas wherein is recorded the pristine Teaching. Furthermore, if this is to be effective, shock treatment is sometimes more suited; further, hints (and polite ones at that) that everything is not alright can all too easily go unnoticed or be ignored.

One may wonder why there is no index at the end of this book. But an index is deliberately avoided. The reason for it is that any phenomenon described in this book cannot be effectively understood unless it is taken in relation to the other phenomena described. Thus the book has always to be taken as a **whole**. In fact, this situation is **necessarily** so when one realizes that to see one of the four noble truths is—as the Buddha himself says—to see **all** the four. And this book is on the four noble truths.



To two categories of readers this book is intended. Into the first category falls that individual who has not come across the Buddha's Teaching, but has a burning desire to find a solution to the problem of his own existence (which is also the problem of his suffering).

For him, this book will be hard, particularly those chapters like the IVth, VIIth and Xth which of that there is no doubt. But this should not discourage him. After all, when has anything worthy been achieved with ease? And a determined effort can even make up for any natural limitation of intelligence. At first reading he will find the book heavy and exacting. He will understand certain portions, but will be completely at sea with others. But every time he reads and ponders on what he does not understand, he will get nearer and nearer understanding. There would, however, be certain things that are not necessary for him in order to achieve the progress he desires. And further he will not be able to make anything of them simply because he would have had no contact with them earlier. These would be particularly those criticisms laid down in Chapter II.

But he would encounter a phenomenon which would present itself to him as an uncalled for distraction: that is, the Pali words and phrases bracketed side by side with the English (not the Pali passages given as footnotes for the benefit of the reader who wants the original Pali itself). But, distracting or disturbing as it would be at first sight, it is a **necessity**: simply because misinterpretations of the key Pali words in the Suttas are so abundant today that it is virtually impossible to come to understand the Buddha's Teaching or effectively communicate it without utilizing the original Pali. He will in fact find himself welcoming the Pali more and more as he develops his understanding. It is not an uncommon thing to find authors priding themselves in the fact that they are offering the Buddha's Teaching "without masses of baffling words in Pali". But such authors do not and cannot explain to the reader what precisely the Buddha taught—a task that is by no means easy. They are in the main writing stories, or at best, catering to the intellectual curiosity of a certain class of readers (amiable scatterbrains gnawed by doubt) who think it fashionable to "know Buddhism" also.



However, this category of reader which we have described, in the beginning has one advantage. It is as if he has a clean slate. "That is, with regard to the Buddha's Teaching, he will have nothing to **unlearn**. He will have nothing to unlearn because he would have learnt nothing wrong because he would have learnt nothing at all.

This brings us to the second category of reader. He too has a burning desire to solve the problem of his own existence. But he is one who **has** come across the Buddha's Teaching, yet unfortunately, either from poor translations of the Pali or from books embodying misinterpretations—and these are many in number—has learnt **wrong**.

The first impact this book will have on him will be plain and simple **confusion**. But being a genuine seeker he will find a content of **pleasure** in that confusion. It happens this way. Since his understanding was wrong, a doubt was lingering in him—sometimes manifest, sometimes unmanifest. Now, doubt is an unpleasant thing, and whenever it arose in him he curbed it by forcing himself into thinking that he had actually understood rightly. Thus, he was being torn between the two: am I right? am I wrong? The confusion that sets in as he reads this book will really be a **confirmation** that he **was wrong**. He now finds he was **justified** in his doubting. And this realization that he was justified—even though it was about his doubting—gives him pleasure.

It is also for him a step forward—the realization that he had not understood what he often wrongly thought he had understood. Yet along with that content of pleasure we just spoke of, he would have adopted a subtle antipathy towards the book, simply because it has so far only confirmed his doubt and done nothing more. But the stage is now set for him to get down to some hard work with the book (which, in a way, is giving the book the exacting demand it may make) and see whether it is offering something more adequate and more satisfying, though perhaps less easy.



## CHAPTER I

### THE EXISTENTIAL AMBIGUITY

There are three self-explanatory laws of thought which can be formulated as follows:—

- (a) The law of identity: If anything is A, it is A.
- (b) The law of contradiction: Nothing can be both A and not-A.
- (c) The law of the excluded middle: Anything must be either A or not-A.

Any thinking that contradicts these laws or disregards them is, in the profoundest sense, both frivolous and irresponsible.<sup>1</sup>

Now, the rationalist thinks that his thinking is already in conformity with these laws. Yet when the rationalist goes a little deeper he finds that things are not quite that way. Accordingly, in our day, we witness scientific thinking (which claims to be rational thinking *par excellence*) struggling to maintain itself even at the expense of being mystic; and the real trouble starts when (as in relativity and quantum theories) it tries to introduce what it calls the 'metaphysical' element in order to get over the difficulties. Here is the physicist James Jeans: "Today there is a wide measure of agreement, which on the physical side approaches almost unanimity, that the stream of knowledge is heading towards a non-mechanical reality. The universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine. Mind no longer appears as an accidental intruder into the realm of matter. We ought rather to hail it as the creator and governor of the realm of matter."<sup>2</sup> Whether scientists ought to hail mind as the creator and governor of the realm of matter or whether they ought rather to hail matter as the creator and governor of the realm of mind is something they will have to keep arguing about for ever.

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1. This statement implies rejection of mysticism. Mysticism will be discussed later in this Chapter.

2. *The Mysterious Universe*, New Revised Edition, 1948, p.186.



And here is Philipp Frank: "Some authors assert, for example, that the only reality in subatomic physics consists of the de Broglie waves. Then we have, of course, the same difficulty as in mechanistic physics; it is hardly more plausible to regard beauty and mystical communion with God as de Broglie waves than to regard them as material masses."<sup>1</sup> The hypothesis of de Broglie waves would of course be replaced by something else as time goes on—if it has not already been done. Nevertheless the ambiguities will still remain. But perhaps these views are not so horrifying as for instance the following two views which have gained currency in quantum theory: (1) "exactly as many things exist as do not exist;" (2) "partly non-existent thing."

In this way rationalism tends towards mysticism in order to find a way out of any difficulties which appear insurmountable. It is solemnly and repeatedly announced today that physics is now more compatible with 'traditional religion' than it has been for centuries. And of course, by 'traditional religion' is essentially meant mysticism. The pity of it is that quite often the rationalist uses mystifications whilst claiming to be non-mystic. In the dusk, the rationalist and the mystic might even pass for mates—each the stirrup-holder for the other—were it not that each is busy taking a bite out of the other's throat. (As an example, note the merciless attack on the illogicality of mysticism in Bertrand Russell's *Mysticism and Logic*. This attack is followed by such a glorification of the scientific method that it makes one think of the mysticism of logic!).

The rationalist, by taking it for granted that he is already in conformity with the laws of thought, develops an attitude which leads him to the conclusion that whatever problem there is to solve can be solved by his objective method. But there is a problem which defies the objective method. The rationalist does not see this problem, or if he does see it, he evades it by

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1. *Philosophy of Science*, pp. 239–240.



not facing it. He does not see that in the final analysis all his rationalism is devoted to hiding from this most important problem there is to solve. The problem is the existence of **he**, the thinker himself, as **subject** ('I'), and this subject ('I') is a contradiction, hence a problem. Thus, in the final analysis, rationalism becomes a kind of self-anaesthetic. Says the existentialist Nietzsche: "Oh, what does all science not cover today? How much, at any rate, does it not try to cover? The diligence of our best scholars, their senseless industry, their burning the candle of their brain at both ends—their very mastery of their handiwork—how often is the real meaning of all that to prevent themselves continuing to see a certain thing? Science as self-anaesthetic: do you know that?"<sup>1</sup>

Today scientists all too often find it impossible to avoid the subject ('I'). They make distinctions between "subject" and "object"; they formulate definitions of them. But equally often they groan that their definitions and distinctions are challengeable. Here is for instance Ernest Nagel on Heisenberg's claim that subatomic physics has made questionable the classical distinction between "observer" and "observed", or "subject" and "object": "Such a claim is intelligible only on the assumption that the terms of this distinction have a defined sense in quantum physics, and that this sense is the same as in classical physics. But we now have sufficient grounds for challenging such an assumption."<sup>2</sup> The difficulty (whether the scientist knows it or not) is that the "subject" **always** evades definition, and therefore any attempt at defining it or making distinctions about it is always challengeable. In fact, with his objective method, the rationalist—whether he be scholar or scientist—is in no position to ask questions regarding the subject ('I'). As a matter of principle he does not wish to know anything about it. Consequently he cannot also come to know anything about the inseparable correlative of this subject ('I')—the world. For the world exists only

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1. *The Genealogy of Morals*, Third Essay, §23.

2. *The Structure of Science*, by Ernest Nagel, f. page 305.



in relation to 'I', and it is essentially **what concerns 'I'**. "The collection of independent public facts produced by the scientific method is inherently incapable of constituting a world, since it altogether lacks any unifying personal determinant—which, indeed, it is the business of science to eliminate. Things, not facts, *pace* Wittgenstein, make up my world."<sup>1</sup> The rationalist or the scientist does not see—or if he does see it he runs away from it—that for all the seizing and enumerating of phenomena that he has done and will be doing by his objective method, he cannot apprehend the world.

This subject ('I') is not just another problem. It is **the** problem from which there is no running away. It **always** presents itself. And unless it is solved, in the final analysis, nothing worthwhile is really solved.

The following passage by Camus (translated from the French by Ñāṇavīra Thera, *vide* his *Notes on Dhamma*) very beautifully indicates the existence of this problem and the predicament into which it puts the subjective thinker:

"Of whom and of what in fact can I say 'I know about that!' This heart in me, I can experience it and I conclude that it exists. This world, I can touch it and I conclude again that it exists. All my knowledge stops there, and the rest is construction. For if I try to grasp this self of which I am assured, if I try to define it and to sum it up, it is no more than a liquid that flows between my fingers. I can depict one by one all the faces that it can assume; all those given it, too, by this education, this origin, this boldness or these silences, this grandeur or this vileness. But one cannot add up faces. This same heart which is mine will ever remain for me undefinable. Between the certainty that I have of my existence and the content that I strive to give this assurance, the gap will never be filled. Always shall I be a stranger to myself. . . . Here, again, are trees and I know their roughness, water and I experience

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1. Ñāṇavīra Thera, *Notes on Dhamma* f. page. xi.



its savour. This scent of grass and of stars, night, certain evenings when the heart relaxes—how shall I deny this world whose power and forces I experience? Yet all the science on this earth will give me nothing that can assure me that this world is mine.”<sup>1</sup>

Regarding this passage, Nāṇavīra Thera says: “A more lucid account by a *puthujjana* of his own predicament could scarcely be desired.” *Puthujjana* means ‘commoner’ or ordinary person, i.e. an individual who does not understand the four noble truths, which are what the Buddha teaches.

Note the key phrases:

“....this self of **which I am assured** ....is no more than a liquid that flows between my fingers... This same heart **which is mine** will ever remain **for me undefinable** ....**Always** shall I be a stranger to myself...how shall **I deny** this world whose power and forces **I experience**? Yet all the science of this earth will give me **nothing** that can **assure me** that this world is **mine**.”

In short, something or other is, in one way or another, ‘self’ and **also** ‘not self’; or again, something or other is, in one way or another, ‘mine’ and **also** ‘not mine’. The **essential** significance of a thing being ‘mine’ is that it always behaves or should behave in the manner **I want** it to, or that I can wield mastery over it. But if that which I consider as ‘mine’ does not behave in the manner I want it to, then it is **not** ‘mine’. The same holds good with anything that I consider as ‘I’ or as ‘myself’.

Sartre, in his existential philosophy, says that I am **for ever not-this**. That means to say that I **am**, that I **exist**; and if I **am**, if I **exist**, then I **must** be identified with **something**,

1. ‘*Le Mythe de Sisyphe*,’ Gallimard, Paris, pp. 34-35.

There is a translation of this book into English—titled *The Myth of Sisyphus* by Justin O’Brien (Hamish Hamilton, London). The passage quoted by us appears in this book on pp. 21-23. We have preferred Nāṇavīra Thera’s translation of the passage.



I must be something or other; but yet I cannot conclude that I am **anything**. Always, I am **not-this**. In other words, I am always in question.

And how am I a stranger to myself? So long as the questions, Am I? Am I not? What am I? What shall I be? Why am I here? How did I come here? From where did I come? Where am I going? etc. come to me, and they remain unanswered, so long shall I remain a stranger to myself.

Whether the thinker be rationalist, mystic or existentialist, he remains in precisely this same predicament, in just this **existential ambiguity** which the Buddha summarized in the words: "(His) very self is not (his) self's."<sup>1</sup>

It is essentially of this same ambiguity that Santayana spoke (though in a down to earth fashion) when he said, "That life is worth living is the most necessary of assumptions, and, were it not assumed, the most impossible of conclusions."<sup>2</sup> This statement, wherein—as in the statement by Camus—the overtones of despair are clearly audible, asserts that life is **of necessity assumed** to be of a **particular** nature though it is impossible to determine that it is **actually** of **that** nature.

This existential ambiguity manifests itself in various forms and at various levels before the thinker. Philosophy—particularly existential philosophy—is studded with such manifestations: "On the one hand, life is ever the same, on the other, it requires perpetual renewal"; "My essence is liberty, I have no essence; that is the height and dizziness of my true position"; "The difficulty facing an existing individual is how to give his existence the continuity without which everything simply vanishes"; "Man is only what he does, yet is always beyond what he does, without being anything in substance or in essence within himself"; etc.

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1. *Attā hi attano natthi*. (*Dhammapada*, Verse 62). A more readable translation of this Pali sentence would be: "He himself is not his own."

2. *Reason in Common Sense*, p. 252.



The subjective existing thinker thus finds himself to be an existing individual whose being is ambiguous, an individual who is as negative as he is positive. To be sure, he can put up with it all if this existential ambiguity determines pleasure and not unpleasure (or suffering), or at least if the content of pleasure there is in existence outweighs its content of unpleasure. But with the reverse holding good—with the predominance of anxiety, worry, fear, sorrow, grief, despair, doubt, etc.—something indeed **has** to be done. Anxiety is a shrinking before **nothing**; and the individual experiences anxiety when he finds that the solid foundation upon which his irreplaceable and familiar 'self' rests—upon which it **must** rest—**is not there**. Thus anxiety—shrinking before nothing—is the father of all fears, fear being a shrinking before **something**. There can be fear only because there is fleeing from anxiety. And, as a shrinking before nothing, anxiety is also a shrinking before a contradiction—rather, **the** contradiction that, in the final analysis, there is **no** real being, that actually and in truth one **is not**. This is the contradiction that threatens the individual's innermost being—the agonizing possibility that he is void of a self that **is always there**. This contradiction between what he **takes** to be his eternal self—'my self'—and its temporal foundation is the father of all particular contradictions between this and that.

The hardest pangs of anxiety, it may be noted, arise when there is the apprehension of old age and death—an apprehension that makes the hitherto friendly and sheltering world become suddenly indifferent to the individual's plight and totally meaningless to him. The Buddha said that before he left for the homeless life he grew up in the lap of luxury and sensual delight. But when as a young man so growing up he saw that he himself was subject to ageing and decrepitude he lost all pride in youth (*vobbanamado*), when he saw that he



himself was subject to ill-health he lost all pride in health (*ārogyamado*), and when he saw that he himself was subject to death he lost all pride in life (*jīvitamado*).<sup>1</sup>

H. J. Blackham, expounding Heidegger's existential philosophy, writes: "Moreover, death does not strike me down, it is not an accident which happens to me, it is from the very beginning one of my own possibilities which I nurse within me. Indeed, it **is** my possibility eminently, because its realization is inevitable and will be realized by me in the most authentically personal way without any possibility of avoidance or substitution."<sup>2</sup> Further, it is a possibility which not only has empire over all other possibilities, since it eventually extinguishes them, but which also has a bearing upon them whilst they remain options; for it reveals their contingency: if I can die, I need not have existed, nobody need exist, . . . .I am cast into the world in order to die there. This is the truth of our situation which is hidden from us by our daily preoccupations and by the authority of the impersonal mode of social existence upheld by common sense . . . .

"Death, then, is the clue to authentic living, the eventual and omnipresent possibility which binds together and stabilizes my existence. . . . I anticipate death not by suicide but by living in the presence of death as always immediately possible and as undermining everything. This full-blooded acceptance (*amor fati*) of death, lived out, is authentic personal existence. Everything is taken as contingent. Everything is devalued. Personal existence and everything encountered in personal existence is accepted as nothing, as meaningless, fallen under the blow of its possible impossibility. I see all my possibilities as already annihilated in death, as they will be, like those of others in their turn. In face of this capital possibility which devours all the others, there are only two alternatives: accept-

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1. *Āṅguttaranikāya I, Tikanipāta, Devadūtavagga, Sutta No. 9.*

2. Sartre, refers to death as 'a cancellation always possible of what I can be, which is outside my possibilities.'



ance or distraction. Even this choice is a rare privilege, since few are awakened by dread to the recognition of the choice, most remain lost in the illusions of everyday life. To choose acceptance of death as the supreme and normative possibility of my existence is not to reject the world and refuse participation in its daily preoccupations, it is to refuse to be deceived and to refuse to be identified with the preoccupations in which I engage: it is to take them for what they are worth—nothing. From this detachment springs the power, the dignity, the tolerance of authentic personal existence.”<sup>1</sup>

In his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*,<sup>2</sup> pp. 147-151, the existentialist Søren Kierkegaard discusses the problem of **what it means to die**. He says some very useful things about death, such as that “one must distinguish between its actual presence and the thought of it.” Yet he points out, “I can by no means regard death as something I have understood”; and this in spite of all the knowledge he has gathered regarding it. Kierkegaard is indeed right about his understanding. Whatever knowledge he has of death is all the knowledge an individual **can** have of death **unless he has understood the Buddha’s Teaching**. It is in the Buddha’s Teaching alone that death and its significance is precisely indicated. The Buddha’s Teaching makes it quite clear that to understand death one must **understand** and **see** (what the Buddha refers to as) the experience of death-**less**-ness (*amatatta*). The value of Kierkegaard’s comments on death is that it brings out the fact that death is not as simple a phenomenon as one would ordinarily reckon it to be, and consequently it induces one to listen to a teacher who offers to explain death well enough, such as the Buddha does. “Monks, he who does not know and does not see ageing-and-death as it really is should seek a teacher for (obtaining) the knowledge of ageing-and-death as it really is; he who does not know and does not see the arising

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1. *Six Existentialist Thinkers*, pp. 95-97.

2. Translation from the Danish by David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie.



of ageing-and-death as it really is . . . the ceasing of ageing-and-death as it really is . . . the path leading to the ceasing of ageing-and-death as it really is should seek a teacher for (obtaining) the knowledge of the path leading to the ceasing of ageing-and-death as it really is.'<sup>1</sup>

If a man were to know precisely when (date and time) he will die—even if it be many years hence—he is bound to feel a dire need to do **something** about it as quickly as possible. For the authentic man to do something about the fact of his dying he does not need to know **when** he will die. It is sufficient for him to know **that** he will die. This lone knowledge that he will die is sufficient for such a man to start doing some honest to goodness thinking, sufficient to stop him from running away from himself, from hiding himself in the 'labyrinthine forms of inauthenticity'. To the vast majority, however, the apprehension of death is a very fleeting one, and they run away from it by a quick return to the routine business of day to day living. It is the existence of this vast majority (and the rationalists are included here) that Heidegger terms 'inauthenticity'—the 'moving automatically in the established ruts and routes of the organized world'. Sartre calls it 'seriousness' or 'serious-mindedness'. This inauthenticity is what reigns over the world; and the inauthentic man hides from himself by identifying himself with the anonymous—the 'They', the 'People', the 'Other', etc.—and so also with the activities of the anonymous. If he is reminded that he will grow old and die, he will quickly—and pompously too—reply that it is something that will happen to the 'other' man also, to 'all' people, to 'every one', and so why be concerned. In this way he gets absorbed by the world 'like ink by a blotter'; he becomes a number in the numerical vastness of humanity. It is 'the

1. *Jarāmaranaṃ bhikkhave ajānatā apassatā yathābhūtaṃ jarāmarane yathābhūtaṃ nānāya satthā pariyesitabbo, jarāmaranasamudayaṃ ajānatā apassatā yathābhūtaṃ . . . jarāmarananirodhaṃ ajānatā apassatā yathābhūtaṃ . . . jarāmarananirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadaṃ ajānatā apassatā yathābhūtaṃ jarāmarananirodhagāminiyaṃ paṭipadāya yathābhūtaṃ nānāya satthā pariyesitabboti. (Saṃyuttanikāya II, Antaraṭṭhaka, Sutta No. 1.)*



flight from personal responsibility, the escape into anonymity'; it is where 'the I remains buried in the one'.

When the inauthentic man laments he laments without understanding, and when he laughs he laughs without understanding. All this happens to him without understanding, purely because he does not see the ambiguous or paradoxical nature of his existence. For him, during six days of the week, in the lecture halls of the rationalist and the laboratories of the scientist, there is **no** self (or soul); on the seventh day, in the sacred precincts of the theologian or mystic, there **is** self. His existence is both tragic and comic. It is tragic in that it takes as meaningful a world that is actually meaningless, and comic in that the world it takes as meaningful is actually meaningless. The inauthentic man, if he strives earnestly in his 'seriousness' or inauthenticity, can at most end up at the top of the social ladder; and when he retires from his social rank, he will have hardly any option but to anaesthetize his old age and conceal his despair by painting landscapes, writing memoirs, angling for fish, or playing bridge.<sup>1</sup> This is the stage wherein the tragi-comedy turns into one big tragedy, because it is now sick in mind **and** in body. Quite clearly, the mind of the inauthentic man is not fit to receive the Buddha's Teaching. He is too sunk in 'doing his duty'—so sunk in it, in fact, that when his time comes, he will find himself incapable of comprehending and following that admonition the Buddha gave the ageing and sick Nakulapita: "For one carrying this body about, householder, to claim but a moment's health—what is that other than foolishness? Therefore, householder you should train yourself thus: 'Though my body is sick, the

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1. Writing memoirs is an attaching oneself to the past, a 're-living' the past. Invariably, in all such writings, one finds the undertone of lament and despair. This is because the writer (now grown old) finds that his existence in the past was better or more alluring than his existence in the present is or will be in the foreseeable future.

He who understands the Buddha's Teaching and practises it will find very little cause for such dwelling in the past.



mind shall not be sick'. Thus, householder, should you train yourself."<sup>1</sup>

The existentialist sees the existential ambiguity. But, though he looks for a solution again and again, he sees none; or he finds that the solution is that there is no solution. Regarding the philosophy of these existentialists, Blackham says: "The main business of this philosophy therefore is not to answer the questions which are raised but to drive home the questions themselves until they engage the whole man and are made personal, urgent, and anguished. Such questions cannot be merely the traditional questions of the schools nor merely disinterested questions of curiosity concerning the conditions of knowledge or of moral or of aesthetic judgements, for what is put in question by the separation of man from himself and from the world is his own being and the being of the objective world. . . . These questions are not theoretical but existential, the scission which makes the existing individual aware of himself and of the world in which he is makes him a question to himself and life a question to him. . . . Existential philosophies insist that any plain and positive answer is false, because the truth is in the insurmountable ambiguity which is at the heart of man and of the world."<sup>2</sup>

The existentialist is, comparatively, an authentic man. Since he sees the existential ambiguity he can laugh and lament with a certain understanding; and in fact he laughs and laments at others because he inwardly laughs and laments at **himself**. But to see the existential ambiguity and to find no solution for it, to find that it is insurmountable, is not a happy position to be in, not very endurable either. So we find the majority of the existentialists seeking relief in either mysticism or rationalism. But because an endorsement of their personal

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1. *Yo hi gahapati imaṃ kāyaṃ pariharanto muhuttaṃ pi ārogyaṃ paṭijāneyya kiṃ aññatra bālya? Tasmātiha te gahapati evaṃ sikkhitabbaṃ: āturakāyassa me sato cittaṃ anāturaṃ bhavissatīti. Evaṃ hi te gahapati sikkhitabban ti.* (*Samyutta nikāya III, Khandhasamyutta, Nakulapitāvagga, Sutta No. 1*).

2. *Six Existentialist Thinkers*, pp. 152-153.



existence seems saner than ignoring it, they are inclined to be mystical rather than rational. Kierkegaard, for instance, turns mystic with his 'faith in God' and 'God-man'; Gabriel Marcel turns mystic with his return to God; and Karl Jaspers turns quasi-mystic with his 'faith in Transcendence.'<sup>1</sup> Sartre tends to be more on the rationalist side. Nietzsche, unable to take either course of retreat, becomes mentally deranged. Yet it is to the merit of these existentialists that they continue to **bring up the problem**. They refuse to tolerate any non-identities, contradictions and excluded middles in their conclusions, and they insist that the laws of thought are not broken. In so doing they draw the existential ambiguity out into the open, thereby creating uneasiness for themselves and anxiety for their rationalist opponents.

Apart from bringing up the problem, the philosophies of these existentialists serve another useful purpose. That is: rather than in their conclusions (or lack of conclusions), in their methods in general which make the thinker's personal existence the prime and proper business of thought, they offer a way of approach to the Buddha's Teaching to the man who, struggling as he is against the all-overwhelming might of current thought and opinion, finds himself puzzled by the Teaching when he first comes across it and begins to wonder what exactly its relevance is.

Now, whilst the existentialist sees the existential ambiguity, the mystic **denies** that there is such an ambiguity. This he does by arbitrarily denying the validity of the laws of thought—a denial which he does as a matter of principle. The problem—i.e. the existential ambiguity—exists only if the laws of thought are valid. If you assume the laws are invalid, the problem does not exist. It is as simple as that.

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1. Blackham points out that this 'faith in Transcendence' of Jaspers' is "an impotent substitute for Christian faith in the God of salvation, which in the ruined world which he gives us is a poor sort of joke."  
(*Six Existential Thinkers*, p. 63.)



But this is not all. The mystic goes a little further. He asserts that there is an **apparent** validity of the laws of thought, and that this apparent validity is purely and simply because of appearances. These appearances, he asserts, are due to the ignorance of the Reality that lies behind, and it is the thinker's task to seek out this Reality. For this purpose he arbitrarily lays down his own laws of thought—laws which are wholly and entirely contradictory: (a) A is not-A, (b) A is both B and not-B, (c) A is neither B nor not-B; and in accordance with these arbitrary laws he develops his thinking, apparently very convinced that the Reality he is after will someday flash before him. Some of them consider it will be the 'Union with the Divine', whilst others consider it will be the 'Beatific Vision'. "Practising mystics, however," says Ñāṇavīra Thera, "who have seen the Beatific Vision, who have realised Union with the Divine Ground, are fully satisfied, so it seems, that during their mystical experience the ambiguity no longer exists. But they are agreed, one and all, that the nature of the Divine Ground (or whatever else they may call it) is inexpressible. In other words, they succeed, temporarily at least, in eliminating the mystery of the individual by Raising it to a Higher Power; they envelop the mystery within the Mystery, so that it is no longer visible.<sup>1</sup> But a paradox is not resolved by wrapping it up inside a bigger one; on the contrary, the task is to unwrap it."<sup>2</sup> In this way the mystics try to answer the unanswerable—whence the name 'mystic'; for an unanswerable question, clearly enough, can only receive a mysterious answer.

If we now sum up these three attitudes within whose boundaries all mental life fluctuates, we have the following situation:

- (a) The rationalist evades the problem—i.e. the existential ambiguity—either by refusing to see it or by blinding himself to the fact that he is violating the laws of

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1. "By not thinking on self transcend self." (Augustine)

2. *Notes on Dhamma*. f. pp. xii-xiii



thought in order to surmount what appears to be insurmountable by his objective method which eliminates the observer.

- (b) The mystic arbitrarily denies the existence of the problem by arbitrarily denying the validity of the laws of thought upon whose validity the problem depends.
- (c) The existentialist keeping to the laws of thought recognizes that the problem exists, but he sees no way out of it.

Where then lies the way out of this unpleasurable dilemma? How is it to be surmounted **without** doing violence to the laws of thought? The answer to that is twofold:

- (a) Either seek assistance from outside in the form of the Buddha's Teaching, or
- (b) Solve the problem without any assistance from outside by becoming a Buddha oneself.

We shall conclude this Chapter by quoting the following passage from Ñāṇavīra Thera's *Notes on Dhamma*, a passage which, to the author's knowledge is the best and most illuminating one that has yet been written on the place that the Buddha's Teaching holds in the mental life of mankind:

"Existential philosophies, then, insist upon asking questions about self and the world, taking care at the same time to insist that they are unanswerable. Beyond this point of frustration these philosophies cannot go. The Buddha, too, insists that questions about self and the world are unanswerable, either by refusing to answer them<sup>1</sup> or by indicating that no statement

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1. "Being seated at one side, the wanderer Vacchagotta said to the Auspicious One: 'How is it, venerable Gotama, is there self?' When this was said the Auspicious One was silent. 'How then, venerable Gotama, is there no self?' A second time, too, the Auspicious One was silent. Then the wanderer Vacchagotta got up from his seat and went away."—*Ekam antam nisinno kho Vacchagotto paribbājako Bhagavantam etad avoca: Kim nu kho bho Gotama atthattā ti? Evaṃ vutte Bhagavā tuṇhī ahosi. Kim pana bho Gotama natthattā ti? Dutiyam pi kho Bhagavā tuṇhī ahosi. Atha kho Vacchagotto paribbājako utthāyāsanaṃ pakkāmi. (Samyuttanikāya IV, Ayyākatasaṃyutta, Sutta No. 10).*



about self and the world can be justified.<sup>1</sup> But—and here is the vital difference—the Buddha can and does go beyond this point: not, to be sure, by answering the unanswerable, but by showing the way leading to the final cessation of all questions about self and the world.<sup>2</sup> Let there be no mistake in the matter: the existential philosophies are not a substitute for the Buddha's Teaching—for which, indeed, there can be no substitute.<sup>3</sup> The questions that they persist in asking are the questions of a *puthujjana*, of a 'commoner',<sup>4</sup> and though they see that they are unanswerable they have no alternative but to go on asking them; for the tacit assumption upon which

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1. The Buddha says: "Therein, monks, those recluses and divines whose belief and view is thus, 'Self and the world are eternal [self and the world are not eternal, and so on] just this is truth and all else foolishness'—that other than mere faith, other than preference, other than tradition, other than excogitation, other than acquiescent meditation of a (wrong) view, they should have the knowledge by themselves, that is purified and cleansed, such a situation is not possible."—*Tatra bhikkhave ye te samanabrāhmaṇā evaṃvādino evaṃdiṭṭhino; sassato attā ca loko ca [asassato attā ca loko ca (and so on) ], idaṃ eva saccam mogham aññan ti, tesam vata aññatreva saddhāya aññatra ruciyā aññatra anussavā aññatra ākāraparivitakkā aññatra diṭṭhinijjhānakkhantiyā paccattam yeva ñāṇam bhavissati parisuddham pariyodātan ti n'etaṃ thānam vijjati.* (*Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 102*).

2. The Buddha says: "This is determined and coarse; but there is indeed such a thing as cessation of determinations. That there is. Knowing thus, and seeing the escape therefrom, the Tathāgata passes beyond."—*Tayidaṃ sankhataṃ olārikaṃ, atthi kho pana saṅkhārānaṃ nirodho. Atthi etaṃ ti iti veditvā tassa nissaraṇadassāvi Tathāgato tad upātivatto.* (*Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 102*).

This is why the Buddha called his Teaching 'beyond the world' (*lokuttara*).

3. "Outside here there is no other recluse or divine who sets forth as the Auspicious One does so real and factual and justified a Teaching."—*Natthi kho ito bahiddhā añño samaṇo vā brāhmaṇo vā yo evaṃ bhūtaṃ tacchaṃ tathaṃ dhammaṃ deseti yathā Bhagavā ti.* (*Samyuttanikāya V, Indriyasamyutta, Vaggo Chattho, Sutta No. 3*).

4. "Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? This creature,—from where has it come? Whither is it bound? . . . ."—*Ahaṃ nu khosmi? No nu khosmi? Kinu khosmi? Kathaṃ nu khosmi? Ayaṃ nu kho satto kuto āgato? So kuhiṃ gāmi bhavissatīti . . . .* (*Majjhimanikāya Sutta No. 2*).



## THE EXISTENTIAL AMBIGUITY

all these philosophies rest is that the questions are valid. They are faced with an ambiguity that they cannot resolve. The Buddha, on the other hand, sees that the questions are **not** valid and that to ask them is to make the mistake of assuming that they are. One who has understood the Buddha's Teaching no longer asks these questions; he is *ariya*, 'noble', and no more a *puthujjana*, and he is beyond the range of the existential philosophies; but he would never have reached the point of listening to the Buddha's Teaching had he not first been disquieted by existential questions about himself and the world."<sup>1</sup>

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1. pp. xi-xiii



## CHAPTER II

### ON UNDERSTANDING THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING

When a person has **developed** a wrong view regarding anything he has wasted time. For him to develop the right view now, he has to waste further time. This is primarily because, when he is now given the right view, he immediately develops an antipathy towards it, and tries to push forward the wrong view he had developed. He pushes this wrong view chiefly because it is for him '**my** view.' Thus time has to be spent once again in breaking down the wrong view. Therefore, the less a person has learned wrong, the less also will he have to unlearn; consequently, the less time will he have to waste.

When it comes to the Buddha's Teaching this matter takes rather serious proportions, and one can spend one's lifetime 'studying' the Teaching but without any progress whatsoever. The Buddha says that one has to develop right-view (*sammā-ditṭhi*). The importance of this view lies not only in its being right but also in its being the **only** view that leads on to the cessation of suffering (or unpleasurableness), which is just what the Buddha's Teaching is designed to lead on to. The obstacles that lie in the path of developing this right view are many. The main ones are worthy of attention; and for a start we may discuss these.

The cessation of suffering, which is nothing but the cessation of even a trace of unpleasant mental feeling—anxiety, despair, sorrow, disappointment, grief, doubt, agitation, worry, fear, etc.—is a very difficult thing to achieve, for the reason that it lies in the destruction of a very stable phenomenon. This phenomenon is the **nescience** (*avijjā*) regarding four things called the four noble truths; and the Buddha's Teaching deals with just these four noble truths (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*). The first of these four truths is: *dukkha* (suffering, or unpleasurableness). The second is: the arising of *dukkha*. The third is: the ceasing of *dukkha*. And the fourth is: the path leading to the ceasing of *dukkha*.



The English words 'suffering' and 'unpleasurableness' are the nearest equivalents of the Pali word *dukkha* here. They do not, however, convey the meaning precisely; nor is there any English word that corresponds exactly to the word *dukkha* when used in the context of the four noble truths. In fact, as we will see in Chapter X, there cannot be a precise equivalent of this word in any other language. For the present however, in this Chapter, we shall use the word 'suffering' to denote *dukkha* in the context of the four noble truths. Later on, once we have determined what exactly is meant by the word *dukkha*, we can drop the word 'suffering' and use the word *dukkha* itself.

Now, the very stability of this phenomenon called *avijjā* (nescience regarding the four noble truths) makes the four noble truths something that is difficult to **see**. *Avijjā* reacts strongly against anything that tries to undermine it and destroy it; and so we find that the Buddha's Teaching **is** difficult to see.

But it is not as difficult to **state** it. This comparative easiness in stating the Teaching makes the Teaching **appear** easy; it gives it a deceptive simplicity. And this appearing easy, or this deceptive simplicity, in turn tends to make the Teaching inaccessible. Quite often one sees the Teaching being taken up objectively and in conceptual fashion, and then passed on, like the man who takes up a basket of mangoes, opens the lid, gazes at the mangoes, closes the lid, and passes the basket on. Taking up the Teaching in this fashion he thinks: what after all is there so difficult in understanding impermanence, suffering, and not-self! The result is that he has very effectively called a halt to his own progress; he remains just where he started from though he thinks he has advanced.

The Teaching is found recorded in what are called the **Suttas**. These Suttas are discourses given by the Buddha and the elder enlightened monks who lived in his time, and they are contained in certain books which form a part of the



*Tipiṭaka.* The *Tipiṭaka* is the total collection of books dealing with the Teaching and with the disciplinary rules for the order of monks following the Teaching. The language of the *Tipiṭaka*, and hence of the Suttas, is Pali. Pali possesses a certain linguistic distinction in that the meaning of many of its key words are free of alien echoes. But it also means that translations of the Pali Suttas cannot always bring out the clarity and exactness that is there in the Suttas, and that when translating them one often has to sacrifice readability for the sake of accuracy in meaning. In fact there may not be precise equivalents in other languages for quite a few of the key words in the Pali Suttas. Under the circumstances, when it comes to such words, one has to resort to one of two things: either use a whole phrase to represent such a word, or use the Pali word as it is having first explained what it refers to. The latter is in fact better.

In the section of the *Tipiṭaka* dealing with the Teaching, there are, apart from the books containing the Suttas, certain books which are Commentaries to these Suttas, and still another seven books—collectively called the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*—dealing with a teaching called the *Abhidhamma*. This *Abhidhamma* of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* is considered in some quarters to be a teaching that runs at a 'higher' level than the Teaching found in the Suttas.

These quarters find it very comforting to think that the Suttas present the Teaching in the language of everyday discourse making use of such purely conventional terms as 'I', 'self,' 'person,' etc., whereas the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* presents the Teaching in its pure abstract form using only such terms as refer to entities that are real from the standpoint of 'ultimate' truth—that is, such terms as refer to the evanescent events (*dhammā*) that constitute the "continuously changing current of mind-and-matter conventionally called a living being." The Suttas, it is thought in these quarters, adopt the Teaching to the intellect of the common man whereas the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* presents the Teaching in such a way as to satisfy the intellectual or the philosophically inclined. This thought



is sustained by the feeling of importance and cleverness the thought itself generates in not very incisive minds. Indeed, the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* could well satisfy the disinterested scholar or the speculative philosopher, but it certainly does not satisfy the individual who is genuinely involved with the problem of his own suffering. Any orderly mind can master the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, but it needs more than an orderly mind even to understand the Suttas, let alone master them. It is also thought that the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* contains the expanded version of what the Suttas refer to as the *abhidhamma*. But the *Abhidhamma* of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* has very little to do with the *abhidhamma* referred to in the Suttas. In the Suttas, the word *abhidhamma* simply means 'essential teaching'; and this essential teaching is nothing but the four noble truths.<sup>1</sup> It is a very obvious characteristic of the *Abhidhamma* of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* that *dukkha* comes in, when it does come in, only as a second thought. The problem is the problem of *dukkha*, and this is precisely what the Suttas repeatedly speak of and set out to solve. It is **the** problem, first and foremost. Any doctrine which treats *dukkha* in a secondary fashion, or brings it in only as an afterthought, is immediately suspect. As we will see later on, to understand *dukkha* is to understand the Buddha's Teaching.

Now, the roots of the misinterpretations of the Suttas are to be traced to these Commentaries and to the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*. It is quite clear that in these works there is more scholasticism than comprehension.

The Buddha's Teaching is not an explanation of things, nor is it an analysis of things. It is a Teaching designed to **lead**, that is to say, to lead one on to the extinction of suffering. It is practical, not theoretical; and any analysis given in it is just sufficient for the practical purpose behind. For example, the analysis given of 'matter' (*rūpa*) is just enough for the purpose of eradicating suffering that arises by reason of 'matter'.

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1. See for example *Majjhimanikāya*, Sutta No. 103.



Further knowledge is clearly unnecessary. The Buddha himself once said, whilst passing through the Simsapa grove, that the knowledge he has is as vast as the leaves in the grove whereas the knowledge he has passed on is as little as the few leaves he held in his hand.<sup>1</sup> And it is only that little quantum of knowledge he has passed down (as against the totality of what he knew) that is **meaningful** or **purposeful** (*atthasamphito*) for that edification which culminates in the greatest triumph—the cessation of suffering. The one who does understand the Buddha's Teaching—at least its ultimate principles—sees that the analyses given in the Suttas **are** sufficient. Such a one sees that these Suttas are essentially a body of instructions indicating what one must do in order to end suffering, and that the explanations embodied in them are only to indicate the validity of the instructions.

This supposed lack of theory (or lack of analysis) in the Suttas is apparently the driving factor behind the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* and the Commentaries. Their obviously scholastically inclined authors seem to be under the impression that a comprehension of the four noble truths can be developed through an extended analysis of things—an analysis not found in the Suttas. Certain students of these exegetical works are in fact of the view that this extended analysis found in them but not found in the Suttas is essential. This is certainly not so. The Suttas, provided they are understood **are** sufficient. On the other hand, if the Suttas are **not** understood, **nothing** is sufficient. The Suttas would be sufficient **for me** if they can lead **me** to the goal. For some, just one Sutta may be enough. Bāhiya Dārucīriya was one such individual.<sup>2</sup> Such individuals are not 'simple' people as one would be tempted to think. They are individuals who are very authentic, and, shall we say, **self-transparent**. For other individuals, many Suttas are necessary. And for still others—in fact, for the vast

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1. *Samyuttanikāya V, Saccasamyutta, Simsapāvanavagga, Sutta No. 1.*

2. *Udāna, Bodhivagga, Sutta No. 10.*



majority—who have neither the inclination nor the endeavour, all the Suttas plus more would not be sufficient.<sup>1</sup>

But the unfortunate part is that this extended analysis found in the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* and the Commentaries provides dangers; and though the seasoned thinker conversant with the Pali Suttas may escape these dangers, the beginner may easily be misled by them, and consequently much of his time may be wasted. The main danger in this extended analysis is that, the analysis itself not being the outcome of seeking the meaning of the Suttas in personal experience, it incorporates things very misleading and contradicting the Suttas. The *cittavīthi* (mental process) of the Commentaries is one of the worst offenders. This *cittavīthi* doctrine describes an experience as a succession of items wherein each item arises **after** the preceding one ceases, and therefore its principle is completely in opposition to the principle underlying the *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent-arising) formulation of the Suttas. Whilst the principle underlying the latter is 'from the ceasing of this, this ceases,' the principle underlying the *cittavīthi* is 'from the ceasing of this, this arises.' This *cittavīthi*—so extensively used in the Commentaries and especially in the *Abhidhammattasaṅgaha*—is **not** found in the Suttas. Even in those early days there was opposition to this misleading doctrine, for it was found necessary by its supporters to censure those who did not accept it.<sup>2</sup> And in the *Atthasālinī*—the Commentary to the *Dhammasaṅgani*, the first book in the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*—written about nine hundred years after the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* itself Buddhagosa very severely censures people who doubt that the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* is really the Buddha's *ipsissimum verbum*. Thus, as with the *cittavīthi*, this points to a state of affairs wherein there had been

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1. The Suttas have the nature of being repetitive. To the scholar these repetitions can be 'oh! so exhausting'. But to him whose intention with regard to the Suttas is to utilize them for the purpose of ensuring his own welfare these repetitions are useful in that he is kept alive to the important things mentioned; and this apart from the fact that the repetitions were necessary, since in the early days the Suttas were handed down orally.

2. See *Visuddhimagga Aṭṭhakathā*.



a solid body of scepticism about the authenticity of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*.

We may be asked whether this *cittavīthi* is not necessary in order to understand the Buddha's Teaching. The answer to that is: quite definitely, it is not. Could it then be useful? We answer: as far as the present writer is concerned **he** has not found it useful, nor does **he** think that anybody else will find it useful in the matter of understanding the Teaching. On the contrary, as already stated, he has found it to be most misleading. Ñāṇavīra Thera goes as far as to call it a 'vicious' doctrine, though by that he does not mean the doctrine has taken to drink and debauchery.

The *Visuddhimagga*, with which so much time seems to be spent in countries like Ceylon and Burma, is another misleading work. In this work by Buddhaghosa, words like *saṅkhāra*, *bhava* and *vibhava* are badly conceived.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the misinterpretations of the Suttas this book carries, it is not a book that **leads** one on. In fact, for the one who is anxious to grapple with the problem of suffering, the book ends with a most disappointing postscript: the author wishes that, by the merit of writing the book he may be born in the *Tāvātimsā* heaven, and then come face to face with the Metteyya Buddha in the far distant future (presumably as a human being again), and after that only, come to the extinction of suffering. But it seems that this note is there only in the Sinhalese texts.

One of the exegetical books called the *Nettipakarana* seeks to make a system out of the Buddha's Teaching, as for instance Science makes out of its observations. Here, one has a difficult problem in chess; and a bystander comes along and offers to solve the problem by converting all the chessmen into plain and simple draughtsmen. To the author of the *Nettipakarana*

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1. See Chapters V and VIII.

The *Visuddhimagga* is an attempt at explaining the Buddha's Teaching. It can satisfy only immature minds, and its attraction seems to lie in its elaborate pedantry.



the Suttas are not a problem in chess; to him they are rather a problem in draughts.

Another misleading book is the *Milindapañhā*, with its 'Neither he nor another' (*na ca so na ca añño*), wherein the author thinks that the answer to the question, "Who is reborn?" is as simple as that! This answer—"Neither he nor another"—contradicts the laws of thought, and it is **not** found in the Suttas. The unfortunate consequence of this so very facile answer is that in some quarters it is thought to be the key to the whole of the Buddha's Teaching. The author of the *Milindapañhā* has made the Buddha's Teaching very easy and simple, though the Buddha himself said it is difficult and profound. "This doctrine won by me is profound, difficult to see, difficult to comprehend, peaceful, excellent, beyond the sphere of reason and logic, subtle, to be experienced by the wise."<sup>1</sup> To make the Teaching easy and simple you have to mutilate it, or leave out the difficulties.<sup>2</sup> As a further example compare the

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1. *Adhigato kho mayham dhammo gambhīro duddaso duranubodho santo paṇito atakkāvacaro nīpuṇo paṇḍitavedanīyo.* (*Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 26.*)

*Atakkāvacaro* is sometimes translated as "unattainable by reasoning" or as "not accessible to doubt." But, as Ñāṇavīra Thera says, "the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* is also, in a sense, inaccessible to doubt; for I cannot doubt my existence without tacitly assuming it. This merely shows, however, that one cannot get beyond the *cogito* by doubting it. And the Dhamma (i.e. the Buddha's Teaching) is beyond the *cogito*. The *cogito*, then, can be reached by doubt—one doubts and doubts until one finds what one cannot doubt, what is inaccessible to doubt, namely the *cogito*. But the Dhamma cannot be reached in this way. Thus the Dhamma, though certainly inaccessible to doubt, is more than that; it is altogether beyond the sphere of doubt. The rationalist, however, does not even reach the inadequate *cogito*, or if he does reach it he overshoots the mark; for he starts from the axiom that everything can be doubted (including, of course, the *cogito*)." (*Notes on Dhamma*, p. 34.)

That the Dhamma is beyond the sphere of reason and logic means that the Dhamma cannot be seen and understood **purely and simply** by a process of logical reasoning. It does **not** mean that reasoning is unnecessary. No. Reasoning **is** necessary; but reasoning **alone** is **insufficient**. Feeling is not a category that can be understood purely by logical reasoning.

2. Leaving out the difficult Suttas or Sutta passages is rather a common strategy adopted in most books written on the Buddha's Teaching.



definition of contact (*phasso*) given in this book with that given in the Suttas. Indeed, the answers (or explanations) given in this book are so slick that one wonders why the Suttas should be so complicated and difficult. Thus there is no **comprehension** of the Teaching indicated in this book, though there is a (false) appearance of comprehension. Comprehension is a more difficult thing to achieve than a (false) appearance of comprehension. Nevertheless this book is popular.<sup>1</sup> In fact, in many quarters, there is a remarkable veneration for all these exegetical books; but side by side, in the same quarters, there is also a remarkable unfamiliarity with the Suttas (or a misunderstanding of them); and it is certainly no surprise that these two things go hand in hand. If the Buddha's Teaching claims to point out suffering and its cessation, and if one sees and understands that the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formulation does show the arising and ceasing of suffering, then one has no doubt that the Suttas contain the Buddha's Teaching. In order to forestall any objections to this statement on the grounds that a knowledge of rebirth is necessary to understand the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formulation, we may point out here itself that the idea of **re**-birth is totally irrelevant in the matter of understanding the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formulation.

Other errors and contradictions can be pointed out in these exegetical books. It is not a difficult task either for the one who is conversant with the Suttas to spot these errors and contradictions. We need not elaborate on them further here; we shall however try to point out a few of the more damaging ones as we go along. Here it is only necessary to state that the erroneous interpretations in these exegetical books have had a big hand in developing that state of affairs wherein the Buddha's Teaching is treated as an antique object of veneration, placed on a pedestal well out of reach and labelled 'do not touch.'

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1. The popularity of this book lies in the fact that everybody can understand it. It contains some admirable demonstrations of how to explain difficulties by leaving them out! The explanation of *phasso* is one such instance.



But these exegetical books develop a pedantic aura around the person who is sunk in them. And this in turn lulls him into a false assessment of his understanding. He thinks he understands what in truth he does not. In this way he halts his own progress. He remains mentally as **barren** as he was when he started, since the fundamental mental barren-ness (*cetokhila*)<sup>1</sup> of not seeing the four noble truths is still there in him. Consequently he does not also perceive what further task he has to perform; moreover, since he experiences no **alteration** in him by virtue of his 'understanding', frustration too sets in.

The Buddha said that his Teaching is 'well said' (*svākhāto*) and 'leading on' (*opanayiko*). Whilst the Suttas well display these important characteristics the same cannot be said of either the Commentaries or the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*. But as we have already mentioned these latter books provide ample opportunity to the pedantically inclined student to be pedantic, or for the professorially inclined to keep developing the art of establishing the truth but of never wanting to appropriate it, and to display as Kierkegaard said, "the lofty equanimity of the scholar, and the comic thoughtlessness of his parrot-like echo."<sup>2</sup> To add to all this quite a lot of the translations of the Pali Suttas are based on the interpretations given in these Commentaries. Together with the scholarly approach adopted by their translators, these translations become seriously misleading.<sup>3</sup>

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1. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 16.*

2. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 24.

There is a story to the effect that when Eudamidas was told that the aged Xenocrates in the Academy was engaged in seeking for the truth, he queried, "But when does he then propose to use it?" The aged man is still **seeking** for the truth. When he gets it, if indeed he does, will he have the time to **use** it?

3. We are however very grateful to these translators and scholars for their editions, dictionaries (even with their mistakes), concordances, indexes, etc., and also for making it so very easy for us to refer to the relevant Pali Suttas as and when the occasion demands. Yet, if there must be translations, let them be at least literal; and if words are included in order to make the translations more readable, let these words be within brackets so as to indicate that they are additions by the translator.



Now, the unfortunate thing about it all is that the student honestly desiring to understand the Buddha's Teaching for the sake of his own welfare is invariably first introduced to these exegetical books of the *Tipiṭaka* and to inaccurate (sometimes even fanciful) translations of the Suttas. He is even told that unless he understands the *Abhidhamma* of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* he cannot understand the Buddha's Teaching (the Dhamma). And so, trusting all this, he goes on. In fact he goes on, and on, and on. A decade later, after ten precious years of his life, he finds himself to have been a collector of ideas (ideas which are at variance with one another, or are hazy and dis-jointed) who is perhaps fit enough to be a scholar or professor in what is called 'Buddhism,' but not one who has been **altered** by the Buddha's Teaching.

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Many an individual who wishes to understand the Buddha's Teaching can be saved years of valuable effort if he heeds the following statement which Ñāṇavīra Thera has written in his *Notes on Dhamma*: "These books of the Pali Canon correctly represent the Buddha's Teaching, and can be regarded as trustworthy throughout. (*Vinayapiṭaka*:) *Suttavibhaṅga*, *Mahāvagga*, *Cūlavagga*; (*Suttapiṭaka*:) *Dīghanikāya*, *Majjhimanikāya*, *Samyuttanikāya*, *Aṅguttaranikāya*, *Suttanipāta*, *Dhammapada*, *Udāna*, *Itivuttaka*, *Theratherīgāthā*. No other Pali books whatsoever should be taken as authoritative; and ignorance of them (and particularly of the traditional Commentaries) may be counted a positive advantage, as leaving less to be unlearned."<sup>1</sup>

These *Notes*, published as a private edition in September 1963, are, if not **the** most effective, undoubtedly some of the most effective and useful things one can find in order to lead

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1. Page vii.



one on to understanding the Suttas. But they are hard, in fact very hard. They assume that the reader is "subjectively engaged with a problem, the problem of his existence, which is also the problem of his suffering." But this alone, i.e. being subjectively engaged with the problem of his existence, does not make these *Notes* accessible; for they assume that the reader is familiar (or is prepared to become familiar) with the original Pali texts. They are also limited in scope, for their principal aim is "to point out certain current misinterpretations, mostly traditional, of the Pali Suttas, and to offer in their place something certainly less easy but perhaps also less inadequate." But the mere pointing out the current misinterpretations of the Suttas is itself a very valuable service, for the student of the Suttas can be greatly benefited by precious time being saved. Whether that which is offered in place of the misinterpretations is right or wrong is something that the student will have to work out by **himself**. And the present writer can assure the reader that it is not something he can do unless he is willing to consistently toil with it for months on end, perhaps years.

Now, a person who takes upon himself the task of solving the problem of his own existence is taking upon himself the performance of one of the hardest tasks. This task, however, is nothing but understanding and practising the Buddha's Teaching. In fact, understanding and practising the Buddha's Teaching is, in the final analysis, the only task **worth** performing. One might well be tempted to think that this is an overestimation. But when one realizes that the Teaching is meant to lead one on to the cessation of suffering, one also realizes that it can **never** be overestimated.

It is well worth remembering that the mere understanding or **seeing** the Buddha's Teaching (which is the degree necessary to reach the **path** leading to the cessation of suffering as against reaching and **experiencing** the cessation of suffering) has as its immediate reward not only contentment but also a feeling of genuine strength. One can test one's strength only in the face of possible death; and the more one can remain



unmoved in the face of death, the stronger one is. This indeed is the real meaning of strength. But it should not be mixed up with the stoical indifference or authenticity exhibited by Socrates as he drank the cup of hemlock, or with the desperate rashness exhibited by an ordinary person when he suddenly puts an end to his life. The strength that is born of understanding the Buddha's Teaching is one that is born of the **knowledge** of what precisely death means and what its consequences **now** are to the individual concerned. It also means going through old age **understanding** old age, and consequently very much less worried by old age than the person who has not understood the Buddha's Teaching is. There is an immense difference between our anaesthetizing our old age and **concealing** our despair by deliberately continuing to work, or by painting landscapes, doing gardening, writing memoirs, etc., and our **facing** old age square in the face, without grumbling about it openly **or** secretly. "Monk, a monk should meet his end mindful and aware. This is our admonition to you. And how, monks, is a monk mindful . . . ." <sup>1</sup> As we will see, the one who has not reached the path to the cessation of suffering is not-prepared for old age and death; the one who has reached the path is semi-prepared for old age and death; and the one who has gone to the **end** of the path and so **has** reached the cessation of suffering is fully-prepared. In fact the Buddha describes the experience of this last individual as one that is **not-ageing** (*ajaram*) and **not-dying** (*amataṃ*). <sup>2</sup>

If however, the task of understanding the Buddha's Teaching is to be performed, then three things must be always remembered and adhered to.

Firstly, one must think **properly**.

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1. *Sato bhikkhave bhikkhu sampajāno kālaṃ āgameyya, ayaṃ kho amhākaṃ anusāsani. Kathaṃ ca bhikkhave bhikkhu sato hoti? . . . .* (*Samyuttanikāya IV, Vedānā-samyutta, Pathamasagāthavagga, Sutta No. 7.*)

2. See Chapter XI.



It is not in thinking that there is such a dearth. It is in thinking that **edifies**. And thinking that edifies is also, of necessity, thinking that is all-of-a-piece, thinking that does not contradict the laws of thought, thinking that forms a single, articulated, consistent whole—a whole such that no one part can be modified without affecting the rest. In a letter to the author (dated 12.5.62) Ñāṇavīra Thera stated:

“... unless one's thinking is all-of-a-piece, that is, properly speaking, no **thinking** at all. A person who simply makes a collection—however vast—of ideas, and does not perceive that they are at variance with one another, has actually no ideas of his own; and if one attempts to instruct him (which is to say, to **alter** him) one merely finds that one is adding to the junk-heap of assorted notions without having any other effect whatsoever. As Kierkegaard has said, ‘Only the truth that edifies is truth **for you**.’ Nothing that one can say to these collectors of ideas is truth **for them**. What is wanted is a man who will argue a single point, and go on arguing it until the matter is clear to him, **because he sees that everything else depends upon it**. With such a person communication (i.e. of truth that edifies) can take place.”

Correctness in the ideas will not come at the outset. That can, and will come, only later. But to begin with, one is thinking in the **right** manner. It may well be that one may have thought out a fairly large edifice in this fashion, and just when one thinks that one has achieved something worthwhile one meets with a contradiction. Years of work may perhaps have to be thrown away at this stage; and a revision would have to be made. Further, it may well be that this revision will have to be made right down the line of the thinking if the **basic** premise on which one started needs revision. The present writer had to throw away a decade of work when he realized that he had started and built on a doubtful premise—the premise that all things are ‘processes’ or that things are in a state of ‘continuous change’ or ‘flux’. Instead of ‘temporal succession’, ‘continuous becoming’ was adopted as the basic premise, hoping that the temporal element would vanish.



The notion of 'flux' wherein the cause **becomes** the effect was thus introduced. But neither did the temporal element vanish as was desired nor did the cessation of suffering become visible. And the revision of this basic premise caused a revision right down the line.

Secondly, one must pay **proper** (*yoniso*) attention to what is being said.

There are two ways of understanding the spoken or written word. One is the notional way; i.e. by assuming that the thoughts which the words have presently called up in the mind of the listener or reader are just the **same** thoughts that caused the words to be said or written. This is the wrong way, and it comes under improper attention. The other way is the correct way; i.e. the listener or reader getting at the thoughts that **made** the words in question to be said or written. This comes under proper attention.<sup>1</sup>

The same word can, in this way, be rightly understood or wrongly understood depending on whether proper attention is paid to it or not.

The Buddha says:

There are, monks, these two conditions for the arising of wrong view. What two? Another's utterance and improper attention. These, monks, are the two conditions for the arising of wrong view.

"There are, monks, these two conditions for the arising of right view. What two? Another's utterance and proper attention. These, monks, are the two conditions for the arising of right view."<sup>2</sup>

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1. In this connection *The Meaning of Meaning* by Ogden and Richards (Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London), is a book worthy of attention.

2. *Dve'me bhikkhave paccayā micchādiṭṭhiyā uppādāya. Katame dve? Parato ca ghoso ayoniso ca manasikāro. Ime kho bhikkhave dve paccayā micchādiṭṭhiyā uppādāyāti.*

*Dve'me bhikkhave paccayā sammādiṭṭhiyā uppādāya. Katame dve? Parato ca ghoso yoniso ca manasikāro. Ime kho bhikkhave dve paccayā sammādiṭṭhiyā uppādāyāti. (Aṅguttaranikāya I, Dukanipata, Āsāvagga, Suttas No. 8 and 9.)*



In the context of understanding the Buddha's Teaching, 'another's utterance' would be the utterance of one who has reached the cessation of suffering; that is, it would be the utterance of an **arahat**. We find this recorded for us in the Suttas. Thus the Suttas can give us a right understanding of the problem of suffering and its cessation, or a wrong understanding of it, depending on whether proper attention or improper attention is paid to them. Wrongly understood, things can become worse, as the Buddha himself said.<sup>1</sup> In the latter case, one can for instance, develop an undue fear for rebirth and be more than normally agitated as to what will befall one after death. Such a person could be more interested in seeking proofs and theories to support rebirth rather than in practising the Buddha's Teaching and lifting himself on to safe ground.

In trying to determine what the Suttas are getting at, there is a certain difficulty one can come up against. This difficulty lies in the fact that quite a number of these Suttas were addressed to those who **did** understand and see the four noble truths, at least fundamentally. Now, the thinking of such individuals is "against the grain" of the thinking of individuals who have no such understanding. Consequently, the implications of what is being said in such Suttas cannot always be correctly grasped by the latter, and the latter can easily get things the wrong way round. The only answer, of course, is to grind away at it all till things begin to sort themselves out. Unfortunately there aren't any short cuts, and it is perhaps best not to treat books written on the Teaching as anything more than **guides** through the Suttas, than things that may assist one in feeling one's way through the Suttas.

Thirdly, one must seek the meaning of the Suttas **in one's own experience**.

In the *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 95*, the Buddha tells us that there is a preserving the truth (*saccānurakkhaṇaṃ*), an awakening to truth (*saccānubodho*), and an attaining to truth (*saccānupatti*).

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1. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 22.*



Preserving the truth is done by handing down what has been said to be the truth and merely believing in it. But to awaken to the truth—i.e. to see the truth, to understand it—the Buddha tells us that one must **test the meaning** (*atthupaparikkhā*)<sup>1</sup> of what has been said to be the truth. This meaning can be tested **only** in one's experience; so that no objective method can bring about an understanding or awakening.

This seeking or testing the meaning of the Suttas in one's own experience is of the **highest** importance. Suffering and its cessation is not something that can be objectively viewed and examined as a scientist would some phenomenon on an experimenting table. It is a very personal matter, and therefore it can be seen only through a sustained effort at looking deep down into the abyss of one's own personal experience. Here every man is assigned to himself; he himself forms the necessary material with which to work; and he himself is the **only** place where **he** can see it with any assurance of certainty. Clearly, no objective method can bring about results. On the contrary more and more confusion can result. The Buddha's Teaching is **not** a subject for scholarship. It is **not** a subject for speculative philosophy, **not** a subject to adorn the scholar's intellect. Like a medicine meant to cure some disease, it is meant to be taken in; and in the taking in, the patient experiences the healing effect. "Māgandiya, it is like a man blind from birth, who could not see dark and bright forms, could not see blue forms, could not see yellow forms, could not see red forms, could not see crimson forms, could not see the like and unlike, could not see the stars, could not see the sun and the moon. . . . His friends, relatives and kinsmen might procure a physician-cum-surgeon; and the physician-cum-surgeon might make up medicine for him, emetics, purgatives, collyriums, ointments and nose-treatments. Because

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1. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 95.*



of that medicine he might gain vision, he might clear his eyes.”<sup>1</sup> (It is important to note that the simile given here is regarding a man blind **from birth**, which means it is regarding a man who has never yet experienced what seeing with the eyes is.)

The Buddha's Teaching is summed up as the four noble truths. Of these four noble truths, he said that the first is to be 'thoroughly known' (*pariññeyya*); the second is 'to be laid aside' (*pahātabba*); the third is 'to be realised' (*sacchikātabba*); and the fourth is 'to be developed' (*bhāvetabba*).<sup>2</sup> Thus these four truths are not a collection of logical propositions. **Feeling** is not a matter for logic. And the scholar who tries to make them a collection of logical propositions can only objectively admire them. But if by that means he thinks he understands them, he is like the man who admires the colour and looks of the liquid in the bottle and imagines he knows its taste and its effect on him. Worse, the scholar thus displaying mere erudition draws the reader's attention away from the real problem; and the reason why he makes hardly any impression on the reader is that the whole procedure of his scholarship, however systematic it be, suffers from a conscious or unconscious ambiguity.

The very sterility of the scholarship that permeates such scholarly works—a sterility that is due precisely to the scholarly intentions behind them—hardly inspires the reader to appropriate the Teaching for his own personal welfare. Often one also sees authors indulging in the very unnecessary and unbecoming practice of calling witnesses to testify to the Buddha's good character and knowledge. Bringing forward such unsolicited testimonials by distinguished personages to testify to the

1. Seyyathāpi Māgandiya jaccandho puriso, so na passeyya kaṇhasukkāni rūpāni na passeyya nīlakāni rūpāni na passeyya pītakāni rūpāni na passeyya lohita-kāni rūpāni na passeyya mañjetthakāni rūpāni na passeyya samavisamaṃ na passeyya tāra-kā rūpāni na passeyya candimasuriye . . . Tassa mittāmaccā nātisālōhitā bhisakkam sallakattam upatthāpeyyum. Tassa so bhisakko sallakatto bhesajjam kareyya uddhavirecaṇam adhovirecaṇam añjanam paccañjanam natthukammam. So tam bhesajjam āgamma cakkhuni uppādeyya cakkhuni visodheyya. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 75.)

2. *Mahāvagga I, Pañcavaggiyakathā, Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta.*



Buddha's competence, etc., reveals a lack of understanding who a Buddha is, and hence a lack of a proper sense of proportion in the matter. All this is of course done with good intention. But the Buddha himself has stated that it is only those who understand the four noble truths that can rightly praise him.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, before any man proceeds to praise the Buddha it would be prudent for him to determine whether he has the qualifications to do so.

In the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*<sup>2</sup> the Buddha says that if his Teaching is learnt for the advantage of censuring (*upārambhānisamsā*) or for the advantage of launching theories (*itivādappamokkhānisamsā*), then the purpose for which the Teaching should be learnt will not be served. He states that he teaches the four noble truths "to one who feels" (*vediyamānassa*): "Now, to one who feels, monks, I make known: this is suffering. I make known: this is the arising of suffering. I make known: this is the ceasing of suffering. I make known: this is the path leading to the ceasing of suffering."<sup>3</sup> Clearly these four truths are not for disinterested scholarship. And the Buddha makes it quite clear that the cessation of suffering that he teaches is not something that he "formulated by (conceptual) thinking, characterized by reflection, of one's own promptitude" (*takkapariyāhatam . . . vīmaṃsānuçaritam sayampaṭibhānam*)<sup>4</sup> but is something that he "abides in having realized here and now through his own direct knowledge" (*diṭṭheva dhamme sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharati*).<sup>5</sup>

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1. *Dīghanikāya, Sutta No. 1.*

2. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 22.*

3. *Vediyamānassa kho paṇāhaṃ bhikkhave idaṃ dukkhanti paññāpemi, ayaṃ dukkha-samudayotī paññāpemi, ayaṃ dukkhanirodhoti paññāpemi, ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadāti paññāpemi. (Aṅguttaranikāya 1, Tikanipāṭa, Mahāvagga, Sutta No. 1.)*

4. *Majjhimanikāya Sutta No. 12.*

5. *Ibid.*



One of the most important things that the Buddha's Teaching brings home to us is that the way to get rid of those phenomena that have to be got rid of lies primarily in the **seeing** and right understanding of the phenomena. And in this matter of seeing and understanding any one of these phenomena, four aspects have to be seen: that is, **what** it is has to be seen, its **arising** has to be seen, its **ceasing** has to be seen, and the **path** leading to its ceasing has to be seen.<sup>1</sup> The seeing and understanding directly attenuates the phenomenon concerned. This attenuation however does not happen if one merely abides in the phenomenon, keeps mentally dwelling on it **without** any understanding about it or its significances. Such action only acts as a furtherance of the phenomenon, only maintains it, and makes it grow. "Monks, whatever a monk thinks and ponders much of, towards that there is inclination in his mind."<sup>2</sup> Thus the more one sees suffering and understands it, the more does suffering get attenuated. That is why arahat-ness (*arahatta*), which is the complete extinction of suffering, is also at one and the same time the complete seeing and understanding of suffering. For this reason the Buddha's Teaching is also called the Teaching of Enlightenment (*sambodhi*).

In the experience of the arahat enlightenment is not the only feature present. Two other important qualities are compassion and tolerance. These two also get developed to the highest degree at one and the same time as a matter of course, even though no particular effort is made to develop them. That is why the Buddha's Teaching has also come to be referred to as the Teaching of Compassion or the Teaching

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1. Satre's saying that man is a "useless passion" is no more than a voicing his frustration. If he really understood that man is a useless passion, then indeed he would have also understood the arising of this useless passion, the ceasing of this useless passion, and the path leading to the ceasing of this useless passion,—which obviously he did not, and cannot without the help of the Buddha's Teaching.

2. *Taṇṇadeva bhikkhave bhikkhu bahulamanuvitakketi anuvicāreti tathā tathā nati hoti cetaso.* (*Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 19.*)



of Tolerance. But it should be remembered that enlightenment, compassion, tolerance, etc. are only **secondary** significances of the arahat's experience. The primary significance is that it is the experience of the extinction of suffering. It is really **this** experience that the Teaching sets out to help one achieve. Stressing those secondary significances may be advantageous from a social or ethical point of view. But the Buddha's Teaching transcends all social and ethical barriers; and if it is to be considered primarily as an ethical or social doctrine, it will indeed not be understood. It has to be looked upon first and foremost as a Teaching that shows the way to the extinction of suffering.

One other matter before concluding this Chapter: that is, what has been referred to as the Buddha's Teaching (and is the subject dealt with in this book) is the **same** as that which is known as the Theravada Teaching. Theravada literally means 'word of the elders'. It is the Teaching as has been handed down by the earliest disciples of the Buddha such as Upāli and Ānanda, and was first written down (in the form of the Pali Suttas) in Ceylon during the reign of King Vattagamini, circa 89 B.C. It is really the original Teaching of the Buddha.

As against this there is the teaching called Mahayana. This began to develop shortly after the Buddha's passing away. By innovation, amalgamation, and reconciliation with other teachings, mainly mystical, the original Teaching got modified into this new form, and in the process lost its essential character. Fortunately this new doctrine began to exist apart from the original Teaching, i.e. apart from the Theravada, and took firmer root than the Theravada in the Eastern countries of Asia such as China and Japan.

The Mahayana view can be summed up in two propositions.

The first proposition is common to all mysticism, and it is as follows: **Behind the appearance of things there lies Reality**, and it is left for us to seek out this Reality. It may



be noted that if existential philosophers<sup>1</sup> admit such a Reality they qualify it by saying that it is necessarily out of reach, and so they do not go so far as the Mahayanists do.

The second proposition is supposed to represent the Buddha's solution to the problem raised by the first proposition, and this second proposition is as follows: **Reality is the non-existence of things.** By this is meant that things aren't **really** there (see the *Ashtasāhasrikā II* or the *Pañcaviṃsatisāhasrikā* of the Mahayana); they only **appear** to be there, and this, only because of nescience (*avijjā*). The view is closely allied to the Hindu notion of *māya*—that all is illusion.

Now the sad part of it all is this: the professed Theravadin not understanding the Theravada Teaching proves this Mahayana contention quite **unaware** that he is doing so. It happens this way:

His acquaintance of the Theravada Teaching tells him that the Buddha has taught *anicca-dukkha-anattā*. Now, he takes *aniccatā* (impermanence) to mean that things are 'processes', that things are 'in continuous flux', that things are 'becoming'. The 'neither he nor another' and the 'in the highest sense there is no individual here' found in the exegetical books like the *Milindapañhā* and the *Visuddhimagga*<sup>2</sup> go to confirm this notion of *aniccatā*. But this notion of *aniccatā* does away with the first law of thought—the principle of identity—which says that A is A. Though certainly A does not remain A for ever, in other words, though A is not eternal or permanent, A must **remain** A even for a short period of time. Otherwise 'is' has no meaning. One cannot even assert that 'this is A' unless A remains A for some period of time or other. *Dukkha* is now by-passed as something obvious and as something everybody knows about; and consequently *anattā* is deduced to mean

1. For example, Jaspers.

2. The *Milindapañhā* says: *paramatthato panettha puggala nūpalabbhati*—"In the highest sense there is no individual here."

In the *Visuddhimagga*, Chapter XVIII, the same view is expressed.



'without self-identity'. If we grant that *anicca* (impermanent) means 'in continuous flux', then this meaning of *anattā* is perfect.<sup>1</sup> So we get the position that 'A is' only for the *puthujjana* who does not see *aniccatā*, and for the arahat who sees *aniccatā* 'A is not'. In other words, there are things existing only for the *puthujjana* because he does not see *aniccatā*, whilst things do not exist for the arahat because he sees *aniccatā*. The second proposition of the Mahayana is thus proved.

From the objective or scholastic point of view all this may not be objectionable, and in those quarters interested in such a point of view there would perhaps be no objection to the contradiction of the laws of thought. But when it comes to the question of *dukkha* the whole thing falls flat, for the one simple reason that it does not tell us why (in the non-arahat's experience) **that which is *anicca* is *dukkha***. It is just **this** that the Buddha's *anicca-dukkha-anattā* aims to tell us; and it is precisely **this** that this interpretation of *anicca* and *anattā* does **not** tell us. So that, in the end, all we have is a theory, but nothing that leads us on to seeing *dukkha* and the cessation of *dukkha*. And all that the Buddha teaches **is *dukkha*** and the cessation of *dukkha*. "Formerly and now also, monks, it is just *dukkha* and the cessation of *dukkha* that I teach."<sup>2</sup>

Apart from the fact that these facile interpretations of *anicca* and *anattā* take us completely away from the problem of *dukkha*, they point to a most peculiar state of affairs wherein *aniccatā* (which is also a thing) is there only because it is not seen, and that with the seeing of *aniccatā*, *aniccatā* disappears. This is of course true in the case of *avijjā* (nescience). When *avijjā* is seen, *avijjā* disappears. But the disappearance or vanishing of *avijjā* leaves *aniccatā* intact and does not at all interfere with the laws of thought. Further, what is the position with regard

1. See Chapter IX for a discussion on the error in thinking that impermanence (*aniccatā*) means things are in 'continuous change'.

2. *Pubbe cāhaṃ bhikkhave etarahi ca dukkhañceva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhaṃ.* (*Majjhimanikāya*, Sutta No. 22.)



to the *sekha* who is neither *puthujjana* nor *arahat*? Does it follow that for the *sekha* things 'are' and 'are not'?

In the Buddha's Teaching this supposed opposition between Appearance and Reality does not come in. An appearance is also something **real**. The appearance of 'water' is something definite and real for him who gazes at the sun shining upon the sand. It persists for some period of time; **for him**, it is as real as those things which determine the appearance are. Indeed there is a problem precisely because this appearance persists. And of all the appearances that persist, the most important one is 'my self'. It persists from birth to death. To make unrealities of all things is to fatally oversimplify the problem, or to delude oneself into thinking that there is **no** problem. For the Buddha, the world is **real**.

The Mahayanists are usually not well acquainted with the Pali Suttas. But they accept them, give them an interpretation in order that they may conform to their own ideas, and then claim to have gone beyond them. In this respect they are somewhat like the Hegelians who claimed to have gone beyond the Biblical or traditional Christianity through a process of reconciliation or by a mediation in a higher synthesis.<sup>1</sup> In the end the Mahayana leaves us with plain and simple mysticism, as for example the *Ashtasahasrikā VII* and the *Vajracchedikā* of its Sutta literature well indicate. But unfortunately, there is so much in the current orthodox Theravadin interpretations of the Pali Suttas (interpretations promoted chiefly by the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* and the Commentaries) to support the Mahayana views. Quite a few of these interpretations can be successfully utilized to ridicule the Theravadin claim to be different from Mahayana. Indeed, the concept of 'process' or 'flux', the 'Neither he nor another,' and the 'In the highest sense there is no individual here'—all of which have become very popular with the Theravadins—are the chief

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1. The description of the Theravada and the Mahayana as 'Basic Buddhism' and 'Advanced Buddhism' or as the 'Narrow Path' and the 'Expanded Path' respectively appears to be the most recent manifestation of this claim.



instruments which push the Theravadin into the Mahayanist lap. In this way one may be thinking along Mahayana lines whilst imagining that one is thinking along Theravada lines.<sup>1</sup> Such individuals find that the Theravada and the Mahayana (the latter with its vast range of proliferating traditions) are agreed on the ultimate principles underlying the Buddha's Teaching—as indeed they **must** find. Or they find that things like *anattā* (not-self) are *upāyas* (devices, or expedients) that the Buddha devised, even though the Pali Suttas make it quite clear that seeing *anattā* is entirely a matter of **rightly-seeing** (*sammadasso*). The more discreet amidst them, however, avoid any kind of comparison.

All this confusion, nevertheless, does enhance the importance of scholarship, and it leaves behind a lot of room for literary research and things like that. But it does not help to make the Buddha's Teaching a **living reality**. No wonder that the late Russian scholar Stcherbatsky lamented: "Although a hundred years have elapsed since the scientific study of Buddhism has been initiated in Europe, we are nevertheless still in the dark about the fundamental teachings of this religion and its philosophy. Certainly no other religion has proved so refractory to clear formulation."<sup>2</sup> That was in 1927. Assuming that by 'Buddhism' Stcherbatsky meant the Buddha's Teaching, can we say that, even in spite of the mass of literature on the subject made available since then, the position is really different today?

It is **only if** suffering and its cessation is rightly understood and seen that one is in a position to evaluate the relative merits of the Theravada and the Mahayana. And when one **does**

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1. The present writer was once such a victim. He is very grateful to the late Ñāṇavīra Thera for having pointed it out to him and subsequently helped him to set himself along the right lines. He is also very fortunate to have had the opportunity of many a discussion with this venerable monk who was gifted with a most incisive and penetrative mind. He who struggles with the venerable monk's *Notes on Dhamma* will see that only too well.

2. *The Conception of Buddhist Nirvana*, p. 1.



come to understand and see suffering and its cessation, then one also comes to see that whilst the Pali Suttas of the Theravada (not the Commentaries and the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*) do lead one on to this understanding and seeing, the Mahayana doctrines do **not**, and hence that the Mahayana doctrines **cannot** represent the Buddha's Teaching. To the scholar this evaluation might indeed appear to be a dogmatic one, not resplendent with the customary lofty equanimity of scholarship, not prepared to see two sides to every question—including that of the cessation of suffering. But it **will** remain dogmatic for him for so long as he remains a mere scholar. Only if he gets beyond his scholarship and tries to **see** the arising and ceasing of suffering in **his** experience will things begin to appear different. He will also then see that mysticism—whether it be of the Mahayana variety or of any other variety—is **not** the way to the extinction of suffering. Any contradiction of the laws of thought is itself a matter of suffering. The laws of thought cannot be contradicted.

Another form of mysticism which claims to be a form of 'Buddhism' is Zen. Zen is, technically, a Mahayana school. One particular form of Zen is primarily the cult of the paradox, as can be seen from its *koans* and statements: 'What is the sound of one hand clapping?' "Burn the scriptures!" etc. Some of the early Zen masters were known to display an appalling sense of humour. Invariably all forms of Zen tag the word 'Buddhism' behind, and so we get 'Zen Buddhism'. But it is certainly **not** the Buddha's Teaching.

In the Buddha's Teaching—as given in the Pali Suttas of course—there is no mysticism whatsoever. In fact these Suttas point out, that thinking in the fashion, "It is not thus for me, it is not so for me not it is not otherwise for me, it is not for me, not it is not not for me" (*evampi me no, tathāpi me no, aññathāpi me no, notipi me no, no notipi me no*)—which is plain and simple mysticism wherein the laws of thought are contradicted—is being foolish (*mando*) and confused (*momūho*), is falling into



equivocation (*vikkhepaṃ āpajjati*).<sup>1</sup> But it is not uncommon to see scholars introducing mysticism into the Pali Suttas. Example: In *The Book of the Gradual Sayings I* (Pali Text Society, 1951)—which is an attempt at translating the *Aṅguttaranikāya I*—the translator speaks of “mystic attainments” (p.82). The Pali word in question is *samāpattikusalatā*, and it means “skilledness in attainment”; but the translator translates it as “skill in mystic attainments”. The word ‘mystic’ is an addition by the translator.

In the Buddha's Teaching—particularly in the doctrine of not-self (*anattā*)—there is the assertion that what is not-self **appears** as self. But this is not mysticism by any means. It would be mysticism if it says that what is not-self **is** self. Or again, to assert that what is impermanent appears as permanent is not to be mystic. It would be mystic only if we say that what is impermanent is permanent. So that, in general terms, ‘Not-A appears as A’ is not a mystic statement; what is mystic is the statement: ‘Not-A is A’. Indeed, there **is** a problem only because what is not-A **appears** as A.

“Now, divine, there are certain recluses and divines who perceive night as day and day as night. This—I say of those recluses and divines—is a living in delusion. But, divine, I perceive night as night and day as day.”<sup>2</sup>

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All that has been said up to now, both in the last Chapter and in this, is by way of introduction and preparation of ground for a proper understanding of the Buddha's Teaching. From hereon we shall be dealing with the Teaching proper.

1. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 76.*

2. *Santi kho pana brāhmaṇa eke samaṇabrāhmaṇā rattimyeva samānaṃ divāti sañjānanti, divāyeveva samānaṃ rattitī sañjānanti. Idamaṃ tesaṃ samaṇabrāhmaṇānaṃ sammohaviharasmim vadāmi. Ahaṃ kho pana brāhmaṇa rattimyeveva samānaṃ rattitī sañjānāmi, divāyeveva samānaṃ divāti sañjānāmi. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 4.)*



### CHAPTER III

#### IMMEDIATE AND REFLEXIVE EXPERIENCE

In the structure of our experience the faculty of reflexion—i.e. of self-observation—is inherent. It is a faculty that can be cultivated and developed; and though it is not very easy a thing to do, it **has** to be developed if progress is to be made.

Reflexion should be distinguished from reflection. The latter is conceptual, and deals with concepts or ideas of things that are **now not present**. Therefore it is abstract thinking. Reflection has a lot to do with memory and is remote from and in fact separated from the existence of the thing being thought of. In this type of thinking error is easily possible and admissible since the concepts that are being used are built up of various individual experiences such as past observations, discussions, readings, etc. Thus it is very easy—and in fact that is what generally happens—for the conceptual thinker to build up misleading and erroneous ideas about his own existence. It may be noted, with some sadness, that what passes off in educational institutions as 'education in life' is just this type of abstract thinking regarding life. And that is why, in the final analysis, it has no real long lasting impact on those who are being educated. That is to say, the **character** and **mental attitude** of those thus educated are rarely, if ever, **altered**.

On the other hand, one can think about a thing **while the thing is present in one's own experience**. We shall refer to this as **reflexion**. The Suttas refer to it by the word *sati-sampajañña*—a compound word made up of two words: *sati* and *sampajañña*.

*Sati* means 'calling to mind.' When it is the **past** that is being called to mind, then *sati* refers to 'memory' (of the past). When it is the **present** that is being called to mind, then *sati* refers to 'mindfulness' (of the present). ('Memory of the present' is a rather confusing phrase which can be avoided without causing any harm. When the present is concerned the single word 'mindfulness' is apt.) In the compound word



*satisampajañña*, *sati* concerns the present; hence it refers to mindfulness; and by mindfulness is meant general recollectedness, not being scatter-brained.

It is the nature of the average individual to be not recollected in mind. It means that without any effort on his part to do so, his mind keeps moving from this to that with great rapidity.<sup>1</sup> About such an individual's mind the Buddha says: "Just as, monks, a monkey journeying along a forest slope, catches hold of one branch, having let it go catches hold of another, having let that go catches hold of another, even so monks, this thing called thinking, called mind, called knowing, day and night, springs up as one thing, and ceases as another."<sup>2</sup> To understand a thing the mind must concentrate on it; and for the mind to concentrate it must get recollected.

*Sampajañña* is 'awareness', and it should not be mistaken for consciousness, or for comprehension.<sup>3</sup> Awareness is the **keeping oneself under constant observation** in order that one does not let one's actions pass unobserved or unnoticed. One **observes** that a feeling has arisen, that it persists, and that it is passing away. So that, feelings are known as they arise, endure and vanish. Likewise perceptions, intentions, etc., are known as they arise, endure and vanish.

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1. James Joyce's *Ulysses* indicates in some detail this scatter-brained nature also the futile occupations that fill the individual's day.

The book is an effective blow at the individual's pomposity wherein he believes that his existence is indeed worthwhile. For this reason it is well worth reading. It was once banned for obscenity. But it has a certain moral profundity in it, and it inspires the reader to thoughtfulness regarding his own existence. Apparently the banning authorities considered that being aware of certain aspects of existence is being obscene. It is a characteristic of inauthenticity to be always hostile towards such revelations.

2. *Seyyathāpi bhikkhave makkato araññe pavane caramāno sākhaṃ gaṇhāti, taṃ muñcitvā aññaṃ gaṇhāti, taṃ muñcitvā aññaṃ gaṇhāti, evameva kho bhikkhave yadidaṃ vuccati cittaṃ itipi mano itipi viññānaṃ itipi. Taṃ rattiya ca divasassa ca aññadeva uppajjati aññaṃ nirujjhati.* (*Samyuttanikāya II, Abhisamayasaṃyutta, Mahāvagga, Sutta No. 1*).

3. *Sampajañña* seems to be more commonly mistaken to mean comprehension



Whilst awareness is not different from mindfulness, it is more specialised in meaning. We may say that awareness is a special aspect of the more embrative phenomenon called mindfulness; it is a particular mode of recollection. "And again, monks, a monk in going forward and in going back, he is aware; in looking straight on and in looking elsewhere, he is aware; in bending and in stretching, he is aware; in carrying his outer cloak, almsbowl and robe, he is aware; in eating, drinking, chewing, and savouring, he is aware; in excreting and urinating he is aware; in walking, standing, sitting, sleeping, waking, speaking and being silent, he is aware. Thus he abides seeing the body in the body internally . . . . Or, his mindfulness that 'there is body' is established in him to the extent necessary for knowledge and mindfulness."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the two words *sati* and *sampajañña* when compounded to the single word *satisampajañña* would mean 'mindfulness-and-awareness'; and it may be noted straightaway that the practice of the Buddha's Teaching is carried out in a state of *satisampajañña*, i.e. in a state of mindfulness-and-awareness. It is to this state that we have also referred to by the single word 'reflexion'. When it comes to the Buddha's Teaching, it must however be remembered that the kind of *sati* implied is *sammā-sati*; that is to say, the kind of mindfulness implied is the **right-mindfulness** as taught by the Buddha.

In this way we find two mental states or conditions: firstly, the normal condition of the average individual, and described in the Suttas as "mindfulness forgotten, unaware, not-

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1. *Puna ca param bhikkhave bhikkhu abhikkante paṭikkante sampajāna-kārī hoti; ālokite vilokite sampajāna-kārī hoti; sammiñjite pasārite sampajāna-kārī hoti; saṅghāṭipattacīvaradhārane sampajāna-kārī hoti; asite pīte khāyite sāyite sampajāna-kārī hoti; uccārapassūvakamme sampajāna-kārī hoti; gate ṭhite nisinne sutte jāgarite bhāsīte tuṇhībhāve sampajāna-kārī hoti. Iti ajjhataṃ vā kāye kāyānupassi viharati ... 'Atthi kāyo' ti vā paṇassa sati paccupatṭhitā hoti yāvad eva ñāṇamattāya patissatimattāya. (Dīghanikāya, Sutta No. 22.)*

In the matter of sleeping one goes to sleep with awareness, bearing in mind the time to awaken. It does not mean that one practises awareness whilst sleeping.



recollected, scatter-brained, senses uncontrolled" (*mutṭhassati asampajāno asamāhito vibbhantacitto pākatindriyo*);<sup>1</sup> and secondly, the opposite condition, which is the condition necessary for understanding, and described in the Suttas as "mindfulness set up, aware, recollected, mind one-pointed, senses controlled" (*upatṭhitasati sampajāno samāhito ekaggacitto samvutindriyo*).<sup>2</sup>

Just as much as there can be right reflection and wrong reflection, there can also be right reflexion and wrong reflexion. But, in comparison to reflection, reflexion has two advantages: (a) mistakes are minimized, and (b) there is always direct contact with the actual. Right reflexion or mindfulness-and-awareness (*satisampajañña*), apart from leading to knowledge-and-seeing (*ñānadassana*) has another advantage. It leads to calm and tranquillity (*samatha*), and hence it is the more pleasant. But it is also the more difficult type of mental application; and demands a higher degree of deliberate effort. Needless to say that it is this type of thinking that is required if one is to solve the problem of one's own existence, and thereby ensure one's own welfare.

Now, any experience which has any degree of mindfulness has two fundamental and important parts: (a) immediate experience, as for instance, when we have made the outside world the object of our experience—the experience of the outside world; and (b) reflexive experience, as when we have made the immediate experience the object of our experience. (We are not considering the experience of reflection here. Reflection always involves reflexion, though not *vice versa*.) Thus, when we perceive a perception, the perception itself, whether **observed** or not, is immediate experience, whilst the observing comes under reflexive experience. And since no observation of the perception can be made unless the perception itself is present, there is no reflexive experience that does not incorporate or involve immediate experience. It should

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1. *Itivuttaka, Tikanipāta, Pañcamavagga, Sutta No. 3.*

2. *Ibid.*



be noted that a mental image or an idea, pure and simple, is also an immediate experience. We also see that, in normal life, unlike reflexive experience which always incorporates immediate experience, pure and simple immediate experience without the reflexive part is extremely short lived.

**Things** are given in immediate experience, and no sooner than reflexive experience occurs, one is directly aware **that there are things**. Thus, in immediate experience the thing is present; e.g. 'consciousness of pain'. Another example would be our being immediately conscious of **movement** (or **motion**); and further, movement being something that involves the passage of time, it indicates to us that immediate experience is a phenomenon that actually **endures**, even though for a very short period of time, and therefore that it has its own hierarchy. (Movement takes place in time—past, present and future—, yet we are conscious of it as a present movement.) In reflexive experience, at its most fundamental though implicit level, the immediate experience is just present; e.g. '**there is** consciousness of pain' or 'there is consciousness of movement'. We may also denote this most fundamental level or order of reflexive experience in these two instances as 'being **aware** of pain' and as 'being aware of movement' respectively. Incidentally, the awareness (*sampajañña*) which we referred to earlier should not be considered identical to this most fundamental level of reflexive experience. That awareness (*sampajañña*) is of a higher degree of reflexive complexity.

In the case of immediate experience of a thing, I am conscious of the thing, but I am not aware that it is **that** thing I am conscious of. In the case of reflexive experience, I am aware that it is of that thing (and not of anything else) that I am conscious. This is the first level of reflexive experience, the most fundamental—being merely aware of the immediate experience. In the case of immediate experience of movement, I am conscious of the movement; but I am not aware that it is movement that I am conscious of. In the case of reflexive experience of movement, at its first and most fundamental level, I am aware that it is **movement** I am conscious of (and



not of anything else). So, that in reflexive experience the thing is 'twice' present, immediately and reflexively.

Reflexion is an advanced order or level of reflexive experience, a higher degree of it; and what we normally do as we continue with reflexion is observing the general **nature** (*dhamma*) of the immediate experience with the immediate experience being present. Thus we disregard the individual peculiarities of the immediate experience and pay attention only to its general characteristics. And since in the structure of our experience the faculty of reflexion is inherent, the immediate experience is always potentially under observation.

In the immediate experience of a thing, attention is on the thing. This attention is immediate attention, and no effort is required to maintain it. With reflexive experience, except at its most fundamental and implicit levels, the case is different. If reflexive experience—particularly at the level of reflexion—is to be maintained, attention has to move from the thing backwards as it were; and it has to be intentionally pulled back since it does not move back spontaneously. Also, immediate experience makes the thing manifest only, but provides no **description** of the thing. It is reflexive experience that provides the description. (Instincts may appear to be at the level of immediacy, but they are really to be classed under reflexive experience. The experience of the perception which gives rise to the manifestation of the instinct is immediate. For example, the touch I experience is immediate, but the instinctive fear that may arise due to the touch is reflexive.)

Reflexive experience, beginning with the most fundamental and implicit level of mere awareness, is resultant from immediate experience; and the temporal relationship between immediate and reflexive experience is that immediate experience comes first, whilst reflexive experience follows with immediate experience **still being present**. Immediate experience is the foundation, and reflexive experience is the superstructure that comes over the foundation. Thus when there is the immediate experience of a perception there is a resultant reflexive experience with regard to the perception with the



perception still lasting. The foundation can be there without the superstructure, but the foundation **has** to be there if the superstructure is to. "Perception, monks, I say result in description. According as one perceives such-and-such, so one describes: 'I was perceptive thus'. This, monks, is called the result of perception."<sup>1</sup> And further: "Indeed, Poṭṭhapāda, perception arises first, knowledge afterwards. But from the arising of perception is there the arising of knowledge. One understands thus: 'With this as condition, knowledge arose in me'.<sup>2</sup> Knowledge, whether right or wrong, is a matter of reflexive experience. (One often comes across the phrase 'intuitive knowledge'. Strictly speaking, there is no knowledge that is not intuitive. But then, what is intuition? Intuition can be described as the immediate contact between subject and object, between 'self' and the 'world'. But this is not yet knowledge. For knowledge a reflexive reduplication is needed; and when this reflexive reduplication is there, we have intuitive knowledge. This intuitive knowledge is still an immediate contact, but with the difference that it is between a **knowing** subject and a **known** object.)

In the Suttas we frequently get the emphatic phrase *evaṃ jānato evaṃ passato* which means, "thus knowing, thus seeing". It is therefore necessary to understand what is meant by this phrase which has a direct bearing on reflexive experience. The **seeing** here is a matter of reflexive experience at the level of reflexion, in that one reflexively sees—rightly, of course (*sammadasso*)—that the experience which is present is of such

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1. *Vohāravēpakkāhaṃ bhikkhave saññā vadāmi. Yathā yathā naṃ sañjānāti tathā tathā voharati 'evaṃ saññā ahoṣin' ti. Ayaṃ vuccati bhikkave saññānaṃ vipāko (Aṅguttaranikāya III, Chakkanipāta, Mahāvagga, Sutta No. 9.)*

In the above, the word *vipāka* (result) is not used in the same sense as it is used in *kammavipāka* (result of intentional action, or fruit of intentional action). In the latter, *vipāka* refers to the delayed result that comes from ethically significant intentional action.

2. *Saññā kho Poṭṭhapāda paṭhamam upajjati, pacchā ñānam. Saññuppadā ca pana ñānuppadō hoti. So evaṃ pajānāti: Idappaccayā kira me ñānam udapādi ti. (Dīghanikāya, Sutta No. 9.)*



and such a nature. One sees it **as it really is** (*yathābhūtaṃ*). When I have a malevolent or hateful thought I **see** and know that it is unpleasant; and I see it as unpleasant **whilst** it is persisting in me. From this seeing or understanding I derive the **knowing** or the **knowledge** (*ñāna*) that it is unpleasant. Such knowledge is reliable; and in this context, knowing is seeing, and seeing is knowing.

As against this, there is a 'knowing' that is **not** derived from seeing. It is something conceptual, a quasi-knowledge, and it is derived from reflection. For instance, I can 'know' the four noble truths by reading about it. This type of 'knowing' is separated from seeing and understanding, and hence also from direct experience. It is to this type of 'knowing' that we refer when we say that something is an 'article of knowledge'. Such 'knowing' or 'knowledge' is not reliable, and, it cannot **alter** the individual. We may also add that it is in this type of 'knowing' or 'knowledge' that the individual who treats the Buddha's Teaching as a subject for scholarship dabbles in. In spite of all his 'knowledge' he may not even be 'warmed' (*usmikato*)<sup>1</sup> by the Teaching.

Further, to see the Buddha's Teaching does not mean only to see that experience is as the Buddha points out. It is also to see that if this experience is to be what it is, then the **structure** of this experience has to be as the Buddha points out, and **not otherwise**. It is not so much a seeing the fact as much as a seeing the **necessity** for the fact. It is only when the necessity for the fact is seen that the individual also sees what **has to be done**. And when he sees what has to be done, he gets **altered**.

Now, the Buddha teaches that there can be only **two** different **fundamental** though implicit reflexive experiences resulting from the same immediate experience. In other words, he tells us that the **mode** (*pariyāya*) of the implicit reflexive experience can be just one of two classes: the one class determining *dukkha*,

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1. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 22.*



and the other not determining *dukkha*. Or we may say: the **root-structure** (*mūlapariyāya*) of reflexive experience is one of two different kinds. It would be very convenient if at this early stage itself we note very summarily to what type of individuals these two reflexive experiences pertain.

They are:—

- (1) The *puthujjana*, i.e. the ‘commoner’, or the ordinary person. **He** has not **understood** or **seen** the four noble truths (or the Buddha’s Teaching) at all. Thus he has not been able to reach the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*, and so he remains a *puthujjana* **whatever** his other attainments be. He is described by the Buddha as one who is “not-seeing things as they really are” (*yathābhūta* *adassanā*).<sup>1</sup>
- (2) The *asekha*, i.e. the ‘learning-ender’. He is more usually referred to as **arahat** (*araham*). He has **fully** seen and understood the four noble truths and **has arrived** at the cessation of *dukkha*. In him there is no *dukkha* **whatsoever**.

However, there is a third class of individual taught by the Buddha. He is:

- (3) The *sekha*, i.e. the ‘learner’. He is also referred to as the ‘noble disciple’ (*ariyasāvaka*). This individual is neither a *puthujjana* nor an arahat (or *asekha*), for he has to a certain extent (depending on the grade of *sekha*) seen and understood the four noble truths. His root-structural reflexive experience is still along the same line as that of the *puthujjana*’s, though generally weaker in the matter of determining *dukkha*. However, **at the level of reflexion**—that is to say, at the level of reflexive experience developed to the order of mindfulness-and-awareness—his understanding of the four noble truths, which is not as

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1. *Samyuttanikāya III, Khandhasamyutta, Attadīpavagga, Sutta No. 7.*



complete as the arahat's, equips him to develop himself to the point wherein that root-structural reflexive experience is altered to that of the arahat's wherein no *dukkha* is determined at all. The *sekha* is therefore **on the path** leading to the cessation of *dukkha*.

Quite clearly, if the Buddha's Teaching is not available, there can be **only** the first type of individual, i.e. the *puthujjana*.<sup>1</sup>

We shall have to speak very much more of these three types of individuals as we go along; but the above descriptions would suffice for the present.

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1. This statement has to be modified to allow for the *Pacceka* Buddhas. A *Pacceka* Buddha is one who achieves arahatness **without** any external aid, but passes away without showing others how to achieve it.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE ROOT-STRUCTURE OF THE PUTHUFFJANA'S REFLEXIVE EXPERIENCE

In the *Mūlapariyāya Sutta* (Discourse on Root-Structure) the Buddha reveals the root-structure of the reflexive experiences of the *puthuffjana*, *sekha* and *arahat* respectively as these result from the immediate experience they may have of any perception. We shall limit this Chapter to the *puthuffjana's* case, and shall deal with the remaining two cases in a later Chapter.

Actually, this Sutta embraces all possible objects of perception whether concrete—such as earth, water, fire, air, etc.—, or abstract—such as 'one-ness', 'many-ness', etc. But the root-structure of the reflexive experience is the same irrespective of what is perceived.

When the *puthuffjana* has immediate experience of (for instance) the earth-mode (or solidity), then the root-structure of his reflexive experience, the Buddha teaches in this Sutta, manifests itself as follows:

"Here, monks, the uninstructed *puthuffjana*, unseeing of the nobles, ignorant of the noble Teaching, undisciplined in the noble Teaching, unseeing of the good men, ignorant of the good men's Teaching, undisciplined in the good men's Teaching, perceives earth (or solidity) as earth. Perceiving earth as earth, he conceives earth, he conceives in earth, he conceives from earth, he conceives 'earth is for me', he delights in earth."<sup>1</sup>

We can schematize the above in the following manner:

- (1) The *puthuffjana* perceives X as X (X referring to whatever is being perceived, which in this instance, is earth)

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1. *Idha bhikkhave assutavā puthuffjano ariyānaṃ adassāvī ariyadhammassa akovido ariyadhamme avinīto, sappurisaṇaṃ adassāvī sappurisaḍḍhammassa akovido sappurisaḍḍhamme avinīto paṭhaviṃ paṭhavito saññānāti. Paṭhaviṃ paṭhavito saññātvā paṭhaviṃ maññāti, paṭhaviyā maññāti, paṭhavito maññāti, paṭhaviṃ meti maññāti, paṭhaviṃ abhinandati. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 1.)*



- (2) Perceiving X as X, he conceives X
- (3) He conceives in X
- (4) He conceives from X
- (5) He conceives 'X is for me'<sup>1</sup>
- (6) He delights in X.

Now, (2) to (6) above represent five progressive levels of **explicitness** in the root-structure of that particular 'phenomenon which characterizes the *puthujjana*'s fundamental reflexive experience. The level that follows is always more explicit than its preceding one; in other words, it is more easily seen or noticed than its preceding one.

As we said earlier, this reflexive experience is a superstructure over the immediate experience. The immediate experience—not mentioned in the Sutta passage—is: the *puthujjana* perceives X. And inasmuch as the superstructure of a building is built after the foundation has been built, this reflexive experience which has to do with knowledge and description comes after the perception.

It should be noted that what is indicated in this root-structure is not that aspect of reflexive experience called reflexion (or self-observation). To the extent that there is awareness of the immediate experience, it has to be classed as reflexive experience (as against immediate experience which does not embody this awareness); but to the extent that no attention is **deliberately** paid to it, and it happens without deliberate effort, it may, in a loose sense, be considered as immediate experience. In this loose sense, this root-structure can be considered as the immediate experience which forms the object of reflexive experience at the level of reflexion.

(1) Indicates the level of mere awareness of the perception, wherein the perception is recognized as the perception of X

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1. In strict grammar *paṭhavim metimaññati* should be rendered "he conceives earth (as) 'for me'". The *Samyuttanikāya IV, Salāyatanavagga, Channavagga, Sutta No. 8*, however, gives *cakkhu meti na maññeyya* which means "he should not conceive: 'the eye (is) for me'". Though there is a very slight difference between these two formulations they are in effect the same.



and of nothing else—"he perceives X **as** X". (He perceives green **as** green.)

The tetrad (2) to (5) is depicting the basic structure of the phenomenon of **appropriation**, of the perception **being in subjection**; and it is **this** phenomenon that characterizes the root-structure of the *puthujjana's* reflexive experience. This means that the most fundamental nature of the *puthujjana's* reflexive experience is just one of appropriation, of the immediate experience being appropriated or brought into subjection; and in (2), (3), (4) and (5)—a tetrad of conceivings—we are given four levels of explicitness in the basic structure of this appropriation. These levels are not to be taken as representing a sequence wherein one arises after the other has ceased. What is described is a single graded structure all implicated in the present. However, it needs hardly be said that some of these levels, being very implicit, are very difficult to see. But an attempt can always be made.

In level (2)—"perceiving X as X, he conceives X"—the appropriation is so subtle that it is barely anything more than just **implied** in the verb 'conceives' (*maññati*).

The conceiving (*maññanā*) refers to conceiving **subjectivity**. And, "perceiving X as X, he conceives X" indicates that when the *puthujjana* has perceived X as X, he is **pregnant** with the possibility of bringing X, which is the object as disclosed in immediate experience, into subjection, or appropriating it. More precisely, it means that when he has become aware that he is perceiving X, he is also pregnant with the conceit (*māna*) 'I' and therewith with the relationship that X, the object as disclosed in immediate experience, is **that which concerns** 'I'. (The object disclosed in the immediate experience is referred to as **name-and-matter**, see Chapter VI.)

The Pali word *māna*, translated by us as 'conceit', is to be understood as a cross between 'concept' and 'pride'. It is not so lifeless as 'concept' in that the word 'concept' does not carry with it the aroma of subjectivity (as the word 'conceit' does); yet it is not so coarse as 'pride'.



In level (3)—“he conceives in X”—X gets **endowed** with the conceit (concept) ‘I’. With this endowment, ‘I’ is no longer a mere concept; it is a concept **with a referent**. That is to say, ‘I’ is not just an idea, just a concept, or a ‘mere name’ as those to whom the Buddha’s Teaching is easy would have it; it is a concept (conceit) that refers to something concrete, and then that something concrete **is** ‘I’.

Perhaps the following simile might help to understand what is meant: I perceive the lump of matter in front of me as **that** particular lump of matter (with its particular colour, shape, etc.) and as nothing else—level (1); and now whilst the perception is still there, I conceive the concept ‘chair’—level (2)—, therewith superimposing it on that particular lump of matter as disclosed in immediate experience—level (3). At this level of awareness of the lump of matter, the concept ‘chair’ is tied up with the awareness—aware of it **as** ‘chair’. In like manner, at this level of awareness of X, the conceit (concept) ‘I’ is tied up with the awareness—aware of it **as** ‘I’. Thus it is said, “in X” and this really means being a part and parcel of the experience of awareness (of X) at this degree or level (of awareness).

As we will realize later on, this level (3) is a very important level. But it is not easily noticeable.

Level (4)—“he conceives from X”—is the level wherein there is the **appearance** that ‘I’ is something **separate** from X. It also indicates that at this level there is more attention on ‘I’.

In level (5)—“he conceives: ‘X is for me’ ”—the separation is explicit. And the apparent relationship between this apparently separate ‘I’ and X is that X is **for** this ‘I’.

In this way, to the *puthujjana*, when there is an immediate experience, it becomes **explicitly** present in his reflexive experience as ‘for me’ (*me*). If we ignore grammar, it is present as ‘for I’.

The *puthujjana*’s experience is not merely the presence of an object. In his experience there is both an object that is present and an **apparent subject to whom** the object is present.



Thus, there is present an object—X—; and there **appears** to be present a subject—'I'. Further, the relation between the two is that the object **concerns** the subject, or **belongs** to the subject. The subject is **master** over the object. Or, the object is **appropriated**. So that, the experience is: 'X is for me', or 'X is mine'. ('For me' and 'mine' are **in effect** the same thing; yet there is a difference between them in that 'for me' makes the apparent separation of the subject from the object more explicit and distinct than 'mine' does. Our Sutta passage indicating the root-structure uses the Pali word *me* which means 'for me' and not the word *mama* which means 'mine'.) Again, if we ignore grammar, we can say that the experience is: 'X is for I'. This of course does not mean that it is the experience wholly and entirely. It only means that it is the **essential** and **most fundamental** part of the experience. We may also call it the **root** (*mūla*) of the experience, resting upon which the other dominant factors of the experience stand.

The Buddha teaches that these conceivings of 'I' and 'mine' are **latent tendencies** (*anusaya*). They are referred to as *ahaṅkāramamaṅkāramānānusaya*, which may be translated as "latent tendencies to the conceits of 'I'-making and 'mine'-making". It means that **no deliberate effort** is made to conceive 'I' and 'mine'. But though it is not voluntary, not deliberate, it is—in the strict sense of the word—intentional.<sup>1</sup> In common parlance, but with the necessary reservations, we may refer to it as the *puthujjana*'s 'sub-conscious' reaction to things—meaning that the *puthujjana* reacts to things in this manner **without deliberation**, and without being **aware** that he is so reacting (unless of course he has been informed). Further, this reckoning a thing (i.e. the immediate experience) as 'I' and 'mine' is the same thing as *making* an 'I' and a 'mine'. It is an 'I'-making (*ahaṅkāra*) and a 'mine'-making (*mamaṅkāra*). In other words an 'I' and a 'mine' are *being made*.

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1. The phenomenon of **intention** will be discussed by us in the next Chapter.



Now, apart from these tendencies to the conceits of 'I'-making and 'mine'-making there is also the tendency to the conceit 'I am' (*asmimāna*)<sup>1</sup>; and the separation of 'I' from the object—level (4)—is actually realized because of this latter tendency. Every time the *puthujjana* conceives 'I' (*aham*) he does so in **different** experiences. But inspite of his conceiving 'I' in different experiences, (and therefore 'I' is a conceit (concept) he implicitly endows on different experiences individually), the explicit level wherein experience after experience is conceived as being **for** 'I' confirms the conceit that this 'I' is something that **stands** (*thiti*) or persists **by itself and separate from experience**. In other words, it confirms that 'I **am**, that 'I **is** (ignoring grammar). Thus, not only **am** 'I', 'I' am also something **separated** from all things. Here again, this reaction is not voluntary or purposive. It requires no deliberate effort. And the *puthujjana* is not aware that it is happening; he does not notice it.

This **being** 'I', or this **existence** of 'I', or this **remaining** 'I', or this **persistence** of 'I' in time, is 'being' (*bhava*) in its most fundamental form. It is in fact **essentially** what in day to day language we refer to as existence or being.

The *puthujjana*, however, sees the above state of affairs the wrong way round. He first deceives himself into thinking that there is a subject **existing** independently of the object, i.e. that 'I' is something existing independent of experience, and that experience is **for** this subject. He thinks: because 'I **am** things are **for** 'me'. But the correct way is: because things are **for** me', 'I **am**. 'I **am** brings the time factor in, the perception of **existing** (in time).

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1. *Asmimāna* is made up of two words *asmi* and *māna*.

<i>asmi</i>	=	am
<i>māna</i>	=	conceit

Therefore *asmimāna* = conceit 'am'.

Since 'I' is always understood when we say 'am', and in order to lay the necessary stress, we translate *asmimāna* as: conceit '(I) am'.



We now come to two very important aspects of 'being', namely, the perception of permanence (*niccasaññā*) and the perception of pleasurableness (*sukhasaññā*)<sup>1</sup>.

Subjectivity—i.e. the conceits 'I', 'mine' and 'am' (*aham*, *mama*, and *asmī*)—is always, to some degree or other, implicitly or explicitly, tied up structurally with the perception of not passing away (*na vayo*), of being not-mortal. Dying, or not-existing, is something that is most repugnant to the *puthujjana's* innermost being. Notions of subjectivity are **always** associated with notions of immortality or permanence. The revelation of the individual as 'I' **requires** this notion of permanence, even though a permanence of 'I' is not an established given. Reflexion on experience will indicate this, for the state of affairs is as follows:

In the **present** experience there is the notion of 'I', and the experience (or a part of it) is itself identified as **that which** is 'I'. In a very subtle manner this **present** experience is **presently** regarded as continuing; and even if this present particular experience is seen to pass away, experience in general is **not** thought to **cease immediately altogether**. When this experience gives way to another, this subsequent another is then identified as that which is 'I'. When **this** which is now identified as 'I' passes away or disappears, there is always **that** to be identified as 'I'. In this way, 'I' is never thought to cease altogether **immediately**. **Always**, there is 'I'. The *puthujjana* occasionally muses that experience will altogether cease—that is, that he will die—as time goes on, some years later. But this happening 'some years later' is a vague concept which corresponds to an actuality that is far remote, and remains **untouched** by and completely separated from both the **present** experience and the immediately following experience. Thus, the *puthujjana*, even when he muses that he will die, never thinks that he will die right **now** at **this** instant or even at the next. So that, 'I' is always implicitly thought to **continue**,

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1. *Aṅguttaranikāya II, Catukkanipāta, Rohitassavagga, Sutta No. 9.*



to **remain**, to **be**, to **exist**, to **persist in time** in one way or another. This perception of being by-itself becomes firm at the level wherein the experience is taken to be 'for I'. Here, a separation of 'I' from the experience is apparent; and the repeatedly taking the successive experiences as being 'for I' more explicitly brings before his eyes an 'I' that stands separate from all experience. And the *puthujjana* thinks that, somehow or other, it does so as a **by-itself**, because of the apparent continuity given by the repeated superimposition on each and every experience the notion that the experience is 'for I'. So that the consequence of this whole state of affairs is that it leads the *puthujjana* to the subtle belief that there **actually** is an I standing **by-itself** apart from all experience, **permanently**; in other words, that 'I **am** irrespective of all else. It is this subtle belief that grips the *puthujjana*, because he is completely unaware of what is happening and does not notice the edifice that lies beneath.

It should be noted that there is a distinction between the considering a thing as 'I' and the notion '(I) am'. The former refers to a mental endowing, a describing—as 'I'. The latter is a reference to an **existence** or a persistence in time—'(I) **am**'. In ascending order of explicitness we get: **as** 'I', **for** 'I', '**am** (I)'.

Now, the perception of not passing away, or the perception of permanence, is different from the view or belief in eternal existence wherein eternity is conceived as the infinity of duration. The latter is only a **consequence** of the former. In every reflexive experience of the *puthujjana* he does not have the view that he will exist in some fashion or other for **all** time. This eternalist view or belief (*sassatavāda*) comes in, when it does come, only in the second place; that is, only in deliberate reflection, and it is **dependent** upon the fundamental conceivings indicated in the root-structure. What there is in **every** reflexive experience of the *puthujjana* is the involuntary perception that he will **continue**, that he will **be**, that he will **not pass away**. Every instant of 'being' perceives **continuation** of 'being'. The question of duration—whether he will



continue for all time or for some time only—is a secondary matter which appears in deliberate reflection. So that it is not the question of **for how long** that forms a part of each and every reflexive experience; it is the perception, subtle as it is, of merely **continuing**, of **being**. The word 'permanent' may not be as suitable as the phrase 'not passing away' (in Pali, *na vayo*) to describe this perception; but it is much easier to handle, and therefore we shall use this word.

This perception of permanence is also tied up structurally with the perception of pleasurableness. In other words, 'is mine' and 'I am'—or more generally, 'being'—are always associated with the perception of permanence and the perception of pleasurableness. These two perceptions are not always to be seen or noticed; nevertheless, if subjectivity is there, then they are also there even to a very slight degree. Subjectivity and the perceptions of permanence and pleasurableness are **structurally inseparable**. This fact can be seen through its converse—*i.e.*, through the experience of the sudden apprehension of death. The sudden apprehension of death is so shocking and unpleasurable an experience. Shock is acute disappointment or unexpectedness concentrated as it were in a very short period of time; and the unexpectedness is in the apprehension that being 'I', which was implicitly always thought **will be**, will now **not be** any more. (If the apprehension is not sudden, but gradual, the shock may be reduced in intensity, even up to the point of it being no longer a shock; yet, unpleasure is there.) The apprehension of death means the apprehension of the **impermanence** of 'I' in its **full** force. But 'I' was always, implicitly or explicitly, considered to be permanent and pleasurable. Hence the unpleasurable shock in the sudden apprehension of death.

Any thing—*i.e.* any object considered **as** a particular phenomenon—always has certain significances associated with it. For example, the consideration of the lump of matter in front of me as a 'chair' is associated with, or is structurally inseparable from, the idea of 'being seated on it'. This 'being seated



on it' is its significance, or, as we shall see later on, its **intention**; and if this significance or intention is not present, then the lump of matter is no longer cognized, or no longer remains cognized, **as** a 'chair'. Likewise, the notion 'I', or the consideration of a thing **as** 'I' is always associated with certain significances (or intentions). And what are these significances? They are the perceptions of permanence and pleasurable-ness. **Without** these significances 'I' has **no** meaning, and nothing can likewise be considered **as** 'I'. In other words, notions of subjectivity always signify perceptions of permanence and pleasurable-ness.

Just as much as conceiving subjectivity itself requires no deliberate effort, the perceptions of permanence and pleasurable-ness do not require deliberate effort. If 'being' is such that pleasure is being **felt**, then pleasurable-ness is plainly perceived. If on the other hand 'being' is feeling unpleasure, then **also** pleasure is perceived. In the latter case the perception is subtle, in that it is the perception of feeling pleasure in that which 'being' (at the time) is **pointing** to. In other words, manifestly unpleasurable 'being' sees the **determination** or the **determining** of a manifestly pleasurable 'being' in the near future as a possibility. The whole point is that 'being' **must** feel pleasure, or—at least—must **perceive** the possibility of feeling pleasure. Otherwise 'being' cannot last.<sup>1</sup>

Now, there is no 'mine' or 'am' or 'being' apart from **something** taken to be 'mine' or 'am' or 'being'. Always it has to be '**this** is mine' or '**this** am I' or '**this** is being'. In spite of all what mysticism may say there is no 'pure being'. What affords the individuals his 'being' is the immediate experience together with—repeat, together with—the taking of the said experience to be 'I' and 'mine'. Briefly, his 'being' is the **persistence of subjectivity**, or the **persistence of subjective experience**.

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1. The existentialist has an inkling of this when he says: "Pleasure is the being of self-consciousness and this self-consciousness is the law of being of pleasure."

(Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. lv.—translation by Hazel E. Barnes).



And since it is the immediate experience that is recognized to be **that which 'I' am** (at this time 'I' is identical to the immediate experience; the immediate experience **is** 'I'), the perception of pleasurable in 'being' (*i.e.* in being-'I') is conceptually realized as the perception of pleasurable in the immediate experience. Level (6) indicates the perceiving of this pleasurable. We have referred to it as 'delighting', the Pali word being *abhinandati*.

On the other side, unpleasure—that is to say, fear, worry, anxiety, etc.—arises with the perception of **danger** to 'being'. Consequently, the acutest unpleasure arises at the perception of total destruction to 'being', or at the apprehension of imminent death.

In this way, pleasure is primarily the pleasure—the pleasant mental feeling—that arises at the perception of 'being', and unpleasure is primarily the unpleasure—the unpleasant mental feeling—that arises at the perception of danger to 'being'. The pleasure or unpleasure increases in degree depending upon the **nature** of the 'being' that is perceived. If it is perceived to be a very welcome mode of 'being', then the pleasure is **very** great; likewise, if the perceived danger to 'being' is very great, then the unpleasure is also very great. **There is no pleasure or unpleasure divorced from 'being'**. (The relief from pleasure and unpleasure, which is a feeling of **ease** that the arahat experiences, should not in any way be mistaken for the pleasure associated with 'being'. This will, however, be dealt with later on.)

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What we have so far described as the basic structure of the phenomenon of appropriation (or of bringing the immediate experience into subjection) is also the basic structure of what is referred to in the Suttas by the word *upādāna*, a word which



can be rendered in English as **holding** or as **grasping**. (Of these two renderings the word 'holding' is easier to handle; therefore we shall use this word as the English equivalent of the Pali *upādāna*). This word *upādāna* (holding) covers a wider field than is covered by the word 'appropriation' or the phrase 'bringing into subjection'; but **in essence**, or **fundamentally**, it refers to the same thing as appropriation or bringing into subjection does. Thus, the levels indicated in the root-structure of the *puthujjana*'s reflexive experience are—in the language of the Suttas—the progressive levels of explicitness in the root-structure of the phenomenon of **holding**.

Now, as we pointed out earlier the levels of this holding (except perhaps the levels (5) and (6)) indicated in the root-structure are not by any means easily noticed, and it takes quite some effort to even roughly see that the root-structure of the *puthujjana*'s fundamental reflexive experience is as indicated therein. What however is noticed easier and can be seen without much difficulty is another phenomenon, not indicated in the root-structure, but is present dependent upon level (6). This phenomenon is referred to in the Suttas as *nandi*, or as *chanda*. We can refer to it in English as **desire**. "To him delighting in that feeling, welcoming it, standing attached to it, desire is born."<sup>1</sup>

What then is desire?

Desire is the **holding** that perception of pleasurableness that is there in 'being', appropriating it, not letting it go. But since holding is fundamentally the considering or the taking (a thing) as 'I', it means that desire is the taking the **perceiving** of pleasurableness in 'being' as 'I'. So that, there is not only a perceiving pleasurableness in being 'I'—(i.e., in 'being'), but also a taking of this perceiving pleasurableness in being 'I' as 'I'; and this taking of perceiving pleasurableness in being 'I' as 'I' is desire.

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1. *Tassa taṃ vedanaṃ abhinandato abhivadato ajjhosāya tiṭṭhato uppajjati nandi.* (*Majjhimanikāya*, Sutta No. 38).



Desire has the characteristic of looking forward. It is dependent upon **anticipation** (*vinicchayo*), "Dependent upon anticipation, desire-and-lust."<sup>1</sup> This anticipation, however, incorporates an evaluation from the point of view of pleasurableness. The Pali word *vinicchayo*, which for want of a better word we have rendered as 'anticipation', is to be understood as involving this phenomenon of evaluation too. One desires to continue this present mode of 'being' or to bring up a new mode of 'being' in the immediate future. Primarily of course it is 'being' or 'am' that is desired (*asmī ti chando*), and whether 'being' or 'am' is to be in **this** form or **that** form comes only in the second place. The **realization** of the desire for 'being', however, is always the desire for a **mode** of 'being'. As we pointed out earlier there cannot be an 'am' separate from something or other reckoned to be 'am': 'this am I'. The precedence we have given to the conceit 'am' is therefore not a **structural** one; it is only a precedence from the point of view of its importance in relation to the problem of suffering. Desire **maintains** the fundamental holding. It is another layer of holding. And it is **this** layer of holding that is explicitly to be seen in experience.

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We said that bringing the immediate experience into subjection, or appropriating it, is what is essentially referred to as holding (*upādāna*). This bringing into subjection, or appropriating, is again nothing but **considering** (*samanupassati*) or reckoning the immediate experience **as** 'I' or 'mine', however subtle that considering or reckoning be. (Considering (*samanupassati*) and conceiving (*maññati*) are slightly different in that the factor of deliberation is clearly present in considering, whilst deliberation is merely pregnant or almost absent in

1. *Vinicchayaṃ paṭicca chandarāgo*. (*Dīghanikāya, Sutta No. 15*).



conceiving. From this point of view we can regard considering (*samanupassati*) as a matured conceiving (*maññati*). This means that to **hold** a thing, or to **appropriate** a thing, or to bring a thing **into subjection** is fundamentally and essentially to consider it as 'I' or 'mine'. This point cannot be overstressed. And the same applies to those phenomena referred to as **attaching, desiring, lusting**, etc. To be attached to a thing, to desire a thing, to lust for a thing, is to—fundamentally and essentially—consider it as being 'I' or being 'for I'. For this reason, these phenomena—attachment (*ajjhosāna*), desire (*chanda*), lust (*rāga*), etc.—are also referred to as holding (*upādāna*).

'This is mine' (*etaṃ mama*) is a rationalization, or a conceptual elaboration, of the conceiving (*maññanā*) described in the root-structure; and 'this am I' (*eso ahaṃ asmī*) is a rationalization of the conceit '(I) am' (*asmimāna*). In the Suttas, these two—'this is mine' and 'this am I'—are classed as views (*diṭṭhi*).<sup>1</sup> They are the two fundamental ways in which the *puthujjana* views or looks upon immediate experience. The former view—'this is mine'—is the more fundamental of the two, and hence it forms the most fundamental of views. The conceiving of 'I' and 'mine', and with it the subtle considering of the immediate experience as 'I' and 'mine', form the fundamental holding, and dependent upon this fundamental holding comes these two views—the views that '**this** is mine' and '**this** am I'.<sup>2</sup> These are views in that they are deliberate reflections, and they are like a coarse layer that stands over the subtle conceiving (*maññanā*) and the subtle conceit '(I) am' (*asmimāna*) which are fundamental in all 'being' (*bhava*). These two views also indicate two **degrees** of holding. A thing is held harder, so to say, if it is considered as that which 'I' **am** than when it is considered as **for** 'I' (or 'mine').

1. *Samyuttanikāya III, Diṭṭhisamyutta, Sotāpattivagga, Sutta No. 2.*

2. Perhaps, very strictly speaking, it is not apt to describe the **conceiving** 'I' (as against the **endowing as** 'I') as holding. But since the considering is always there with the conceiving, no harm is done by reckoning the conceiving itself as a part and parcel of the phenomenon of holding. That means to say, in this loose sense, we can consider *maññanā* as a part and parcel of *upādāna*.



## CHAPTER V

### THE FIVE-HOLDING-AGGREGATES

A sufficiently detailed understanding of **what** is held—i.e. of what is being considered as 'I' and 'mine'—is now necessary.

The Buddha teaches that there can be holding to only one or more of five things referred to by him as the five *khandha*. We can render the word *khandha* as **aggregate**; other suitable renderings would be group, or mass, or totality. And the five aggregates (or *khandha*) are the aggregate of **matter** (*rūpa*), **feeling** (*vedanā*), **perception** (*saññā*), **determinations** (*saṅkhārā*), and **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*). They are the "things to be held" (*upādanīyā dhammā*).<sup>1</sup>

Now, since in the case of the *puthujjana*, reflexive experience is fundamentally one of holding, these aggregates are, for him, **with holding** (*sa-upādāna*). For example when he has feeling (*vedanā*), that feeling would be **in combination with** the consideration that the feeling is 'for me'; similarly with the other four aggregates. So long as reflexive experience is fundamentally one of holding, any experience which has the reflexive constituent is a case of the five aggregates with holding, and therefore of the **five-holding-aggregates** (*pañcupādānakkhandhā*). In this way the experience of the *puthujjana* is always a case of five-holding-aggregates. His entire 'being' is comprised of these five-holding-aggregates. His 'world' is the totality of these five. (In order to distinguish this 'world' from what in day to day language is referred to as the world, we use the word within inverted commas—'world'. Properly speaking, there should be no necessity for us to resort to such a device, since the individual **cannot** take into account any world other than this (his) 'world'. But we have become so objective in our thinking (what with the rationalism of our rationalists *par excellence*?) we have to take good care that, when we think

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1. *Samyuttanikāya III, Khandasamyutta, Dhammakathikavagga, Sutta No. 9.*



on matters pertaining to our existential position, our thinking does not go off the rails.)

We also see that in the experience of a living being, none of these aggregates can exist by itself separated from the others. They are inseparable, and of their inseparability the Venerable Sāriputta says: "That, friend, which is feeling, that which is perception, that which is consciousness—these things are associated, not dissociated, and it is impossible to show the distinction between these things having separated them from one another. For, what one feels, friend, that one perceives; what one perceives, that one cognizes."<sup>1</sup> Then we have the Buddha teaching: "Were one, monks, to declare thus: 'Apart from matter, apart from feeling, apart from perception, apart from determinations, I will show the coming, or the going, or the disappearance, or the appearance, or the growth, or the increase, or the abundance of consciousness'—that situation is not possible."<sup>2</sup>

It also becomes clear that the problem of suffering and its cessation must lie in these categories called the five-holding-aggregates. Experience, of whatever kind it be, is within these five, confined to these five.

In order to obtain the required understanding of these aggregates we may treat each aggregate separately, though of course in actual experience they are inseparable.

\* \* \* \*

1. *Yā ca āvuso vedanā yā ca saññā yañca viññāṇaṃ ime dhammā saṃsaṭṭhā no visaṃsaṭṭhā, na ca labbhā imesaṃ dhammānaṃ vinibbhujitvā vinibbhujitvā nānākaranaṃ paññāpetuṃ. Yañcāvuso vedeti taṃ sañjānāti, yaṃ sañjānāti taṃ vijānāti* (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 43).

2. *Yo bhikkhave evaṃ vadeyya: ahaṃ aññatra rūpā aññatra vedanāya aññatra saññāya aññatra saṅkhārehi viññāṇassa āgatiṃ vā gatiṃ vā cutiṃ vā upapattiṃ vā vuddhiṃ vā virulhiṃ vā vepullaṃ vā paññāpessāmīti etaṃ thānaṃ vijjati* (Samyuttanikāya III, Khandha saṃyutta, Upāyavagga, Sutta No. 1).



It would be best to start with the aggregate called consciousness (*viññāṇa*). Consciousness may be given the pride of place for the reason that any experience means **being conscious of** the other four aggregates. I am conscious of matter (i.e. I am conscious of my body or of an external object, or of both); I am conscious of feeling; I am conscious of perception; and I am conscious of determinations.

What, however, is meant by being **conscious** of something?

When I say I am conscious of something, it means that that something is **present** to me. A sight, a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or an image is present. A pleasant feeling, an unpleasant feeling, or a neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling is present. It is **present** to me. I am conscious of it.

Quite clearly, in experience, consciousness without an object of which one is conscious—a 'pure consciousness'—is an impossibility, an inconceivability. Further, the object of consciousness cannot be consciousness itself. That is, we cannot have 'consciousness of consciousness'—which is the same thing a 'presence of presence'. We can have consciousness **only** of matter, feeling, perception and determinations. Also, we cannot speak or think of any object that has no relation with consciousness. Though we speak of consciousness and objects separately, they are inseparable in experience, and when separately spoken of, they are mere verbal abstractions. When in this abstract way we speak of "consciousness," the Suttas tell us that we are making, an "aggregate-designation" (*khandha-adivacana*).<sup>1</sup> As against this, when we speak of "consciousness of X" we are speaking of a concrete and particular thing and not of something abstract.

As we have pointed out in Chapter III, consciousness (*viññāṇa*) should not be mistaken for awareness (*sampajañña*). 'Consciousness of movement' and 'awareness of (consciousness of) movement' are not the same. Awareness involves **consideration** to some degree or other. What is so often referred

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1. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 109.*



to as 'unconscious' is more appropriately called 'unaware'. When a man is asleep, we cannot say that he is not conscious,<sup>1</sup> but we can say that he is not aware. It is the necessity to recognize the difference between consciousness and the first order of awareness that has given rise to words like 'unconscious', 'sub-conscious', 'semi-conscious', etc. These words essentially refer to that degree of consciousness barely involved in just immediate experience (conscious of X), but not in awareness of the experience (conscious of X **as** X). The Suttas do not speak of varying degrees of consciousness such as 'unconscious', 'sub-conscious', etc; however, they do speak of a state wherein feeling and perception have ceased, and therefore consciousness also has ceased, but there is the heat and vitality in the body, and so there is a return to consciousness at the end of the time predetermined before the attainment of the state. In Pali the attainment of this state is called *saññavedayitanirodhasamāpatti* (the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling).<sup>2</sup>

Now, as regards 'what-ness', or as regards essence, consciousness is negative; it cannot be seen, heard, smelt, tasted or touched. Also consciousness does not refer to the phenomenon that is present, nor even to a part of the phenomenon. It is not **what** is present, nor is it a part of what is present. It is only the **presence** of the phenomenon. It is the presence of that which is present. In an immediate visual experience **the thing is seen** though **eye-consciousness is not seen**. Eye-consciousness is negative as regards essence. But in reflexive experience, that is reflexively, eye-consciousness is present—**there is** eye-consciousness. Thus, whilst other things can be directly described in terms of their positive essence as 'this thing' and 'that thing', consciousness cannot be so described. Yet, if anything is to be described, it must be present at least in imagination; and its presence is consciousness. So we have a situation wherein consciousness is that upon which

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1. If he were not conscious, he cannot be woken out of his sleep by a noise. If he does not in some sense **hear** the noise, he will not awaken; and if he hears it, he must be conscious.

2. *Majjhimanikāya*, Sutta No. 44.



other things depend for their **existence** (whether in this form or that form). And that merely means that consciousness is the **existential determination**.

Since consciousness is negative (regarding essence) it is always associated with the body; it is "fastened there, bound there" (*ettha sita ettha paṭibaddha*).<sup>1</sup> Therefore in the Suttas we get the phrase: "body endowed with consciousness" (*saviññāṇaka kāya*).<sup>2</sup> Normal experience, however, is multiple; that is, in an experience there is seeing, hearing, etc. The experience is not confined to one faculty alone; and so we can sufficiently well distinguish six kinds of consciousness which arise dependent on **six bases** (*saḷāyatana*), viz., eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. "Whatever, monks, consciousness arises in dependence upon, by that it is reckoned. The consciousness which arises in dependence on eye and sights is reckoned as eye-consciousness; the consciousness which arises in dependence on the ear and sounds is reckoned as ear-consciousness; the consciousness which arises in dependence on the nose and odours is reckoned as nose-consciousness; the consciousness which arises in dependence on the tongue and tastes is reckoned as tongue-consciousness; the consciousness which arises in dependence on the body and touches is reckoned as body-consciousness; the consciousness which arises in dependence on the mind and images is reckoned as mind-consciousness."<sup>3</sup>

Each one of these six bases is described as that thing which is "in the world (and) by which there is world-perceiving and

1. *Majjhimanikāya*, Sutta No. 77.

2. *Samyuttanikāya III*, *Khandhasamyutta*, *Arahattavagga*, Sutta No. 9.

3. *Yaññadeva bhikkhave paccayaṃ paṭicca uppajjati viññāṇaṃ tena teneva saṅkhaṃ gacchati: cakkhuñca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati viññāṇaṃ cakkhuvīññāṇanteva saṅkhaṃ gacchati; sotañca paṭicca sadde ca uppajjati viññāṇaṃ sotaviññāṇanteva saṅkhaṃ gacchati; ghāṇañca paṭicca gandhe ca uppajjati viññāṇaṃ ghāṇaviññāṇanteva saṅkhaṃ gacchati; jivhañca paṭicca rase ca uppajjati viññāṇaṃ jivhaviññāṇanteva saṅkhaṃ gacchati; kāyañca paṭicca phoṭṭhabbe ca uppajjati viññāṇaṃ kāyaviññāṇanteva saṅkhaṃ gacchati; manañca paṭicca dhamme ca uppajjati viññāṇaṃ manoviññāṇanteva saṅkhaṃ gacchati* (*Majjhimanikāya*, Sutta No. 38).



world-conceiving"—*lokasmim lokasaññī hoti lokamāni*<sup>1</sup>. Thus the eye can be described as that spherical lump of flesh in the world by which there is seeing (or sight-perception) of the world and conceiving of the world; the ear can be described as that membrane called the ear-drum and a fleshy flap projecting out of the head, in the world, by which there is hearing (or sound-perception) of the world and conceiving of the world; so can the nose, tongue and body be described. And the mind (*mano*, not *citta*) can be described as that thing in the world—principally the grey-matter in the head—by which there is imagining (idea-perception or image-perception) of the world and conceiving of the world. Physiological descriptions of these six bases are out of place here; such descriptions are also not necessary. The rough descriptions given are quite sufficient. But, the description of the mind-base just given appears inadequate for the reason that though there can be no hearing based on the eye-base or no seeing based on the ear-base (and so with three other bases), there can be seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching of a sort based on the mind-base. In other words, based on the mind-base there can be imaginary sights, imaginary sounds, imaginary smells, imaginary tastes, and imaginary touch. Therefore, from this point of view, the mind-base can be regarded as incorporating five imaginary bases based on which five kinds of imaginary percepts arise. It may however be noted that mental phenomena referred to as telepathy, clairvoyance, retrocognition, precognition, etc. may not conform entirely to this scheme of the mind-base being considered as five imaginary bases.

Thus, reckoning all the six bases, we have consciousness being spoken of in the Suttas as follows:

“And what, monks, is consciousness (*viññāṇa*)? It is these six consciousness-bodies (or consciousness-groups) namely: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness,

1. *Samyuttanikāya IV, Saḷāyatana-samyutta, Lokakāmaguṇavagga, Sutta No. 3.*

This statement is explained in Chapter X.



tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, mind-consciousness. This, monks, is called consciousness."<sup>1</sup>

Our earlier phrase "body endowed with consciousness" can therefore be slightly expanded to "six-based body endowed with consciousness" (*saviññāṇaka saḷāyatanika kāya*).

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Perception (*saññā*) refers to the quality or to the percept itself. The percepts are sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and idea (or image). The qualities of a sight would be shape and colour; a sound may be of a high tone or a low tone; a taste would be bitter, sweet, acidic, etc.; and so on with others. We also see that the quality of a percept is independent of the perceiver in that it is imposed upon the perceiver and is not entirely determined by his own volition. When there is the sight of a tree, a shape is seen; but this shape is independent of the perceiver. Similarly the pitch (or frequency) of a sound is independent of the sound being heard.

"And what, monks, is perception (*saññā*)? It is these six bodies-of-perception, namely: sight-perception, sound-perception, smell-perception, taste-perception, touch-perception, idea-perception (*dhammasaññā*). This is called perception."<sup>2</sup>

The *Visuddhimagga* tends to mix up perception (*saññā*) with consciousness (*viññāṇa*). In Chapter XIV, it tends to understand consciousness as a more elaborate version of perception,

1. *Katamañca bhikkhave viññāṇaṃ? Chayime bhikkhave viññāṇakāyā: cakkhu-viññāṇaṃ sotaviññāṇaṃ ghānaviññāṇaṃ jivhāviññāṇaṃ kāyaviññāṇaṃ mano-viññāṇaṃ. Idam vuccati bhikkhave viññāṇaṃ. (Saṃyuttanikāya III, Khandhasaṃyutta, Upāyavagga, Sutta No. 4).*

2. *Katamā ca bhikkhave saññā? Chayime bhikkhave saññakāyā: rūpasaññā saddasaññā gandhassaññā rasasaññā phoṭṭhabbasaññā dhammasaññā. Ayam vuccati saññā. (Saṃyuttanikāya III, Khandhasaṃyutta, Upāyavagga, Sutta No. 4).*



thus approximating it to knowledge (*ñāṇa*)<sup>1</sup>. This is wrong. Whilst there is always consciousness where there is perception, there is not always knowledge. As we pointed out in Chapter III knowledge is always **preceded** by perception. Consequently, perception is structurally simpler than knowledge. The difference between consciousness and perception is one of **kind**, not one of **degree**. In the Suttas, however, we occasionally find *viññāṇa* being used in two senses—first, in the sense of consciousness as in the primitive context of the aggregates (*khandha*), and second, in the sense of knowing—but never in the sense of perception.<sup>2</sup> And when it is used in the sense of knowing, it is really referring to the complex consciousness of reflexion, i.e. to the presence of a **known** phenomenon. The following is a Sutta passage where (*viññāṇa*) is used in both these senses: “Here, friend, an uninstructed *puthujjana*, unseeing of the nobles, . . . . undisciplined in the good men’s Teaching, regards matter . . . . feeling . . . . perception . . . . determinations . . . . regards consciousness as self, or self as endowed with consciousness, or consciousness as belonging to self, or self as in consciousness. That consciousness of his changes and becomes otherwise; as that consciousness (*viññāṇa*) changes and becomes otherwise so his knowing (*viññāṇa*) follows around (keeps track of) that change of consciousness . . . .”<sup>3</sup>

1. The **Visuddhimagga** says: “Perception is like the child without discretion seeing the coin, because it apprehends the mere mode of appearance of the object as blue and so on. Consciousness is like the villager seeing the coin, because it apprehends the mode of the object as blue etc., and because it extends further, reaching the penetration of its characteristics.” (Translation by Bhikkhu Ñānamoli)—*Saññā hi ajātabuddhino dārakassa kahāpanadassanaṃ viya hoti nīlādivasena ārammaṇassa upaṭṭhānākāramattagahanato. Viññāṇaṃ gāmikassa purisassa kahāpanadassanaṃ iva hoti nīlādivasena ārammaṇākāragahanato uddham pi ca lakkhaṇapaṭivedasampāpanato.*

2. The usage of *viññāṇa* in the sense of knowing could perhaps be the reason for the confusion in the *Visuddhamagga* concerning *viññāṇa* and *saññā*.

3. *Idha āvuso assutavā putthujjano ariyānaṃ adassāvī . . . . sappurisa-dhamme avinīto rūpaṃ . . . . vedanaṃ . . . . saññaṃ . . . . saṅkhāre . . . . viññāṇaṃ attato samanupassati viññāṇavantaṃ vā attānaṃ attani vā viññāṇaṃ viññāṇasmiṃ vā attānaṃ. Tassa taṃ viññāṇaṃ vipariṇāmati aññathā hoti, tassa viññāṇavipariṇāmaññathābhāvā viññāṇavipariṇāmanuparivatti viññāṇaṃ hoti . . . (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 138).*



Feeling (*vedanā*) is broadly of two kinds—bodily (*kāyika*) and mental (*cetasika*). This is not a difficult distinction to see in experience. For example, the painful feeling from a wound in the body would be classified as a bodily painful feeling; so would a headache. Sorrow and joy, on the other hand, would be classified as mental feelings; so would be fear and worry.

In this book, adjectives like 'pleasant', 'unpleasant' and 'painful' will be used by us to describe what is either bodily **or** mental. Thus, a pleasant feeling can be either a pleasant bodily feeling or a pleasant mental feeling. But the adjectives 'pleasurable' and 'unpleasurable' will be used only in reference to the **mental**. Thus a pleasurable feeling will **always** be a pleasant mental feeling, and an unpleasurable feeling will always be an unpleasant mental feeling. Similarly, the nouns 'pleasure' and 'unpleasure' will be used only in reference to mental feeling—to pleasant mental feeling and unpleasant mental feeling respectively. Two other words used by us—'pleasurableness' and 'unpleasurableness' are also only in relation to the mental.

From the point of view of **quality** any bodily feeling or any mental feeling is one of three kinds, viz., pleasant (*sukha*), or unpleasant (*dukkha*), or neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant (*adukkhamasukha*). A headache is a bodily unpleasant feeling (*kāyikā dukkhā vedanā*). Joy is a pleasant mental feeling (*cetasikā sukhā vedanā*). As for neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling (i.e. feeling which is in itself neutral) it is said: "Neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling is pleasant when known and unpleasant when not known."<sup>1</sup> This statement, however, is not quite easy to see. But we can work its meaning out. A neutral feeling (i.e. a feeling that is neither pleasant nor unpleasant) is known to be neutral or not known to be neutral. Now, **if** when it is known to be neutral it is **felt** as pleasant, and **if** when it is not known it is **felt** as unpleasant, then it

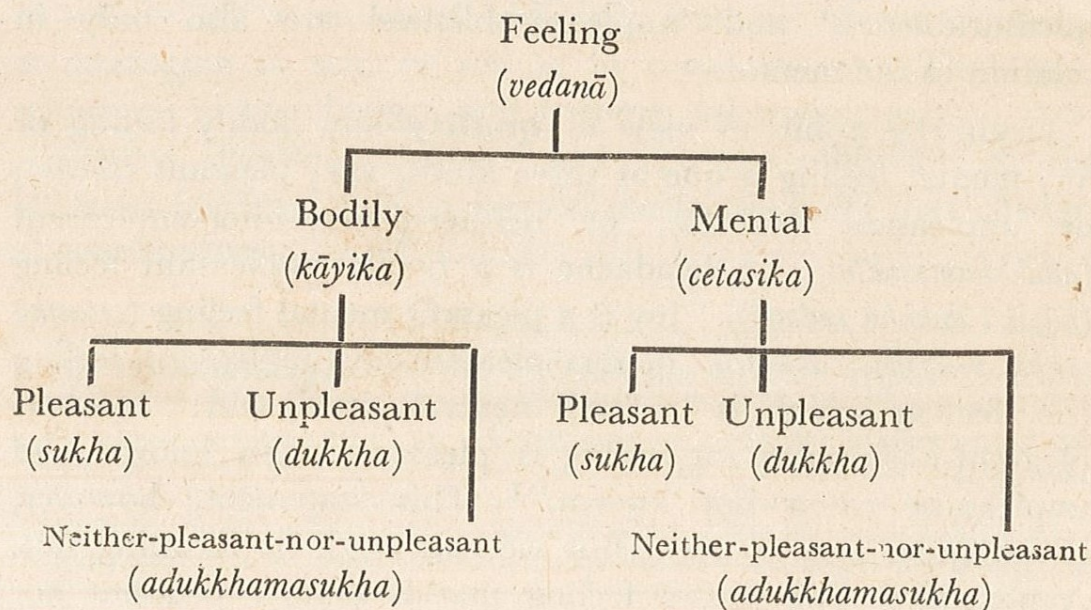
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1. *Adukkhamasukhā vedanā ñāṇasukhā aññāṇadukkhāti.* (*Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 44.*)



means that a neutral feeling cannot exist; for if it is known it is felt pleasant and if it is not known it is felt unpleasant. And since it is **always** either known or unknown, it cannot exist **as** neutral. But a neutral feeling—say a feeling of indifference—can exist. That means to say the Sutta statement indicates a different situation. And the situation indicated is this: When there is a neutral feeling, and it is **known** to be neutral, it is **perceived** or **reckoned** as pleasurable; likewise when there is a neutral feeling, and it is **not known** to be neutral, it is perceived or reckoned as unpleasurable. In the *Samyuttanikāya IV, Vedanāsaṃyutta, Paṭhamasagāthavagga, Sutta No. 3*, it is said that one has to give up delighting (i.e. perceiving pleasurableness) in neutral feeling. Obviously this delighting referred to can come only if one **knows** it to be neutral.

The classification of feeling given by us so far can be diagrammatically represented thus:



This classification is given in *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 44*.

At this stage it would be best to note the distinction between feeling and perception. Though this distinction is not a difficult one, it is sometimes not seen clearly enough.



When I experience a taste in my tongue, that is just **perceiving** a taste (which may be bitter, sweet, etc.). But simultaneously I experience a **feeling** in the tongue, and this feeling is a bodily feeling, because the tongue is a bodily phenomenon. (In this context the word 'bodily' (*kāyika*) includes the entire body; but when we speak of six sense-bases, and the body is said to be **one** of them, we do not include those parts of the body called eye, ear, nose, tongue and brain (mind) in the sense-base referred to as the body. The Suttas follow this system. It is therefore necessary that we note it, else confusion can result). Thus, when I drink a hot cup of tea I perceive a pleasant (sweet) taste along with an unpleasant (burning) feeling in my tongue. This unpleasant feeling is a bodily feeling, because the tongue is a bodily phenomenon. Likewise, when I experience a touch with some part of my body such as the arm, leg, neck, etc., that is just perceiving a touch with the sense-base body; but along with it I can have a pleasant feeling in that part of the body, and this pleasant feeling is a bodily feeling, again because the body is a bodily phenomenon. Or yet, the sight of magnesium burning in oxygen is a beautiful sight (eye-perception); but along with it there is a very unpleasant feeling in the eye, and this unpleasant feeling in the eye is a bodily feeling, because the eye is a bodily phenomenon. Similarly we can see this state of affairs with the nose and the ear. With the sense-base mind the position would be as follows: when I think of eating a tasty dish there is an image-perception; but along with it there is also the feeling happy about it, and this feeling happy is a pleasant mental feeling, because happiness is a mental phenomenon. We should of course remember that mental feeling is not confined only to image-perception. We have mental feelings when we experience the other percepts and bodily feelings as well. (In the examples of experience given by us we have only attempted to distinguish feeling from perception, and not to point out all the kinds of feelings and perceptions that may be present in the experiences).



It should be noted, and **always** remembered, that what the Buddha's Teaching is designed to do is to lead one on to the utter cessation of the feelings classified as mentally unpleasant (*cetasikā dukkhā vedanā*), such as anxiety, fear, worry, despair, agitation, sorrow, doubt, etc. These unpleasant mental feelings **as a whole** can be referred to by the single word **unpleasure**. In the Suttas, this unpleasure is also referred to by the word *dukkha*. It is in fact one of the **three** contexts in which the word *dukkha* is used. In the second context, *dukkha* is used as an adjective to describe feeling—*dukkhā vedanā*; and *dukkha* here merely means unpleasant or painful, and so it can refer to either bodily or mental feeling. In the third context, *dukkha* is used in the four noble truths—i.e. *dukkha*, the arising of *dukkha*, the ceasing of *dukkha*, and the path to the ceasing of *dukkha*; and it is to understand *dukkha* in this **third** context that all our effort is necessary. Provisionally, we have rendered *dukkha* in this third context as 'suffering' or 'unpleasurableness'. This matter will however be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter X. We should also note that, in the Suttas, when feeling is referred to without making the distinction as to whether it is bodily or mental, it is more often mental feeling that is referred to. The reasons for it are twofold: (1) the Buddha's Teaching is aimed at completely destroying the possibility of unpleasant mental feeling, and (2) if the subject is identified with feeling, then it is not so much with bodily feeling as with mental feeling.

Feeling can be classified in other ways too, depending upon the point of view that would be adopted. A very important classification, however, is that classification based on the different ways in which feeling arises.

This is given as follows:

"And what, monks, is feeling? It is these six bodies-of-feeling: feeling sprung from contact with the eye, feeling sprung from contact with the ear, feeling sprung from contact with the nose, feeling sprung from contact with the tongue, feeling



sprung from contact with the body, feeling sprung from contact with the mind. This, monks, is called feeling."<sup>1</sup>

In the above the Buddha refers to a phenomenon called **contact**. The Pali word is *phassa*. This is a very important phenomenon, because without it there can be no experience. Further, if feeling and perception are to be distinguished from consciousness it is necessary to understand this phenomenon called contact. We might therefore discuss this phenomenon here itself.

Contact is defined in the Suttas as follows:

"In dependence on eye and sights springs up eye-consciousness. The coming together of the three is called contact . . . . In dependence on ear and sounds . . . . In dependence on nose and smells . . . . In dependence on tongue and tastes . . . . In dependence on body and touches . . . . In dependence on mind and images (or ideas) springs up mind-consciousness. The coming together of the three is called contact."<sup>2</sup>

The six (living) sense organs—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind—mentioned in this definition are referred to as the **internal bases** (*ajjhakkāni āyatanāni*). The percepts corresponding to these six internal bases are referred to as the **external bases** (*bāhirāni āyatanāni*).<sup>3</sup> These are sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and image (or idea). These things concern things external to the individual, i.e. **whatever is not one's six-based body**; and therefore, those things that are perceived as their qualities (such as shape, colour, smell, etc.) are not entirely dependent upon the individual who is perceiving them.

1. *Katamāca bhikkhave vedanā? Chayime bhikkhave vedanākāyā: cakkhusamphassajā vedanā sotāsamphassajā vedanā ghānasamphassajā vedanā jīvhasamphassajā vedanā kāyasamphassajā vedanā manosamphassajā vedanā. Ayam vuccati bhikkhave vedanā. (Samyuttanikāya III, Khandhasamyutta, Upāyavagga, Sutta No. 4).*

2. *Cakkhuñca paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññānaṃ. Tinnaṃ sangati phasso . . . Sotāñca paṭicca sadde ca . . . Ghānañca paṭicca gandhe ca . . . Jivhañca paṭicca rase ca . . . Kāyañca paṭicca phoṭṭhabbe ca . . . Manañca paṭicca dhamme ca uppajjati manoviññānaṃ. Tinnaṃ sangati phasso. (Samyuttanikāya II Abhisamayāsamyutta, Gahapatavagga, Sutta No. 3).*

3. These six pairs of bases (internal and external) are given in *Majjhimanikāya*, Sutta No. 137.



If we consider only one particular sense organ, then the corresponding external base would be **whatever is not that sense organ**, and therefore the corresponding perceptions are not entirely dependent upon that sense organ. It matters little whether, for instance, the individual is colour-blind or does not hear well. Whatever colour or sound he perceives, that thing which is the external condition for the colour and the sound he perceives is **external to his eye or ear**. (If experience were confined only to one sense organ, then that organ and its corresponding percept would not be distinguishable one from the other; there would then be just an experience describable in terms of the five-holding-aggregates. Since experience is involved with more than one single sense organ a distinction between a particular sense organ and its corresponding percept is made possible through the **other** organs). The percepts are called the external bases because those external things (or those things other than the six-based body) that get involved in contact, get involved in the existential structure, whenever they do, **only** in terms of the percepts. (These percepts may also be referred to as 'sense objects'). Thus, not only are there an eye and eye-consciousness, there are also sights and things cognized by eye-consciousness (i.e. things seen); the same holds for the other five sense organs.<sup>1</sup>

Contact is, then, the **coming together** of the sense organ, the kind of consciousness involved with the particular sense organ, and that which is not the organ. The experience 'seeing a tree' involves the coming together of the eye, eye-consciousness, and that particular thing which is not the eye. This coming together, or this **union**, is called contact. And both feeling and perception (in this case, the neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant bodily feeling, the pleasant mental feeling of joy, the particular shape, the green colour, the smell, etc.) arise owing to this contact.

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1. For confirmation of this statement see *Samyuttanikaya IV, Migajālavagga, Sutta No. 6*.



“Monks, it is like the heat born, the fire produced from the putting together and rubbing of two sticks; when those two sticks are separated that heat so founded ceases, is allayed. Even so, monks, these three feelings (i.e. pleasant, unpleasant, and neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant) are born of contact, rooted in contact, conditioned by contact, dependent upon contact; owing to such and such contact such and such feelings are born; such and such contact ceasing, such and such feelings cease.”<sup>1</sup> The same applies to perception; and therefore both feeling and perception are dependent upon contact. “Contact is the cause, contact is the condition for the manifestation of the aggregate of feeling. Contact is the cause, contact is the condition for the manifestation of the aggregate of perception.”<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, **primarily**, contact is the contact between the individual and **external things**; and this contact gives rise to feeling and perception. In the reflexive experience of the *puthujjana* it would always be a contact between a subject ‘I’ and things. In other words, with the *puthujjana*, the contact is **with holding** (*sa-upādāna*).

\* \* \* \*

We may now consider the first aggregate, namely, the aggregate of matter. The word *rūpa* has been translated by us as **matter**. We may also translate it as **substance**. (In the Suttas the word *rūpa* is also used to refer to the percept sight).

1. *Seyyathāpi bhikkhave dvinnam katthānam saṅgaṭṭhanasamodhānā usmā jāyati tejo abhinibbattati tesam yeva katthānam nānābhāvā vinikkhepā yā tājā usmā sā nirujjhati sā vūpasammati. Evam eva kho bhikkhave imā tisso vedanā phassajā phassamūlakā phassanidānā phassapaccayā; tajjam tajjam phassam paṭicca tājā tājā vedanā uppajjanti; tajjassa tajjassa phassassa nirodhā tājā tājā vedanā nirujjhanti.* (Saṃyuttanikāya IV, Vedanāsaṃyutta, Sagāthavagga, Sutta No. 10.)

2. *Phasso hetu phasso paccayo vedanakkhandhassa paññāpanāya. Phasso hetu phasso paccayo saññakkhandhassa paññāpanāya.* (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 109.)



Matter has two characteristics:

- (1) It is describable; or, it can be distinguished as shape, colour, sound, smell, taste, touch and image.
- (2) It is possessed of **resistance** (*paṭigha*), or of inertia; and this is independent of the particular percept that manifests it.

Beyond the above, the basic structure of matter can be specified in terms of **four primary modes of behaviour** (*cattāro mahābhūtā*) or four primary patterns of inertia, each of which presents itself in the passage of time, however short. They are: (1) earthy (*paṭhavī*), or persistent, or solid; (2) watery (*āpo*), or cohesive; (3) fiery (*tejo*), or maturing; and (4) airy (*vāyo*), or moving or windy. Any lump of matter, i.e. any particular *rūpa*, can in this way be regarded as a particular **group of behaviours**, and matter can be considered as the four primary modes of behaviour within which all groups or sets of behaviour fall.

Now, a clock, a bird, a bottle of ink—each one of these represents a set of behaviours which we note when it is cognized by us. Because each set of behaviours is always present in the **same** fashion whenever cognized, the view arises that there is a lump of matter independent of consciousness. Likewise, in the general way, the view arises that there is a material world which is independent of us individuals, and this view is the starting point for science (physics, chemistry, biology, etc.). Thus the material world of science is by assumption, or by definition, **devoid of the individual's point of view**; it is **public**, or **communal**. Accordingly, science starts by making itself inherently incapable of understanding material change due to conscious action; for, conscious action is **individual** and **intentional**, and intention is the exercise of preference for one available behaviour (or set of behaviours) at the expense of others. Thus also the tremendously difficult and unending task for particularly those fields of science which come in contact directly with the individual's consciousness—



physiology, psychology,<sup>1</sup> medicine, surgery, etc. By interpreting material change due to conscious action in a mechanico-materialistic fashion, these can do little more than patch up leaks. And quantum physics in hoping to reinstate the 'observer'—i.e. the scientist himself—is only locking the stable door after the horse has been stolen.

A visual experience involves eye-consciousness and an auditive experience involves ear-consciousness. Therefore between a visual experience and an auditory experience there is a difference in consciousness. But though there is a difference in consciousness there may **or** may not be a difference in the lump of matter or the set of behaviours concerned. The clock may provide the visual experience whilst the bird may provide the auditory experience; or the clock may provide both the visual and the auditory experience. On the other hand, two kinds of visual experience involve the same kind of consciousness, but two sets of behaviours. Sight of the clock and sight of the bird involve two sets of behaviours called clock and bird.

Thus, whatever thing there be that appears as behaviour (or as matter, or as inertia)—**that** thing, **in itself** does not involve consciousness, as for instance perception does. But for there to **be** behaviour there must be a cognition of it **as** behaviour; in other words, for behaviour to **exist**—which means, for matter to **exist**—it must be phenomenal. Purely in itself, matter or behaviour cannot be said to exist. Apart from cognition is the behaviour called the solid-mode really the solid-mode or something else? Or, independent of perception what 'actually' is matter? These questions are meaningless and unanswerable. They are meaningless and unanswerable because they are asking me to determine whether there exists a thing called such-and-such without ever having to cognize it by any of my six senses. For me to be able to say that a thing exists I must first cognize it, simply because its existence is always **in some form**, and this 'in some form'—without

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1. Psychology has become a dumping ground for things for which rationalism has no use but yet are far too well established to be termed 'superstitions'.



which there can be no existence—comes in **only** with my cognition of it. If one mode of behaviour is to be distinguished from another so that we may say that there are two different modes, they must exist or be phenomenal as two different modes.<sup>1</sup> And if they are to so exist they must be cognized, and so be **present** in reality or at least in imagination. Otherwise there can be no **existence** of behaviours. Now, if in itself, behaviour cannot be said to **exist**, then it cannot also be said to **cease**; for, a thing to cease it must first exist. But behaviour or matter—rather, that which appears as behaviour or matter—can be said to **get a footing in existence**, and it gets this footing in existence by **being present in some form**, or by **appearing in some form** (as sight, sound, smell, touch, etc.). Therefore the Buddha says that the question, “Where indeed, venerable one, do these four primary modes of behaviour finally cease?”<sup>2</sup> is an improper and meaningless question which has to be rejected.<sup>3</sup> The proper question, the Buddha points out, should be, “Where do (the four primary mode of behaviour called) earth, water, fire, air get no footing?”<sup>4</sup> In other words, where do these four modes not appear? or, where do they not become phenomenal? This is a meaningful question; because it is a question that is directly involved with **cognition** or **existence**. And the answer to it

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1. The question could be raised as to what the **material** difference between two modes of behaviour or two patterns of inertia is. Science would answer in terms of things like **frequency**. But this question would involve us in a discussion of an order of structure underlying the four primary modes of behaviour—a discussion, which for the purpose of ending suffering is not at all necessary.
  2. *Kattha nu kho bhante ime cattāro mahābhūtā aparisesā nirujjhanti?* (*Dīghanikāya*, Sutta No. 11).
  3. Underlying this question is also an attempt at obtaining complete objectivity wherein a general consciousness common to all is posited. Kant falls into the trap by positing a “pure original unchangeable consciousness” or a “unity of consciousness” and in so doing renders his whole philosophy unsound. (See **Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason**, translated by Norman Kemp Smith). Such a consciousness is a contradiction, simply because consciousness and individuality are one.
  4. *Kattha āpo ca paṭhavī tejo vāyo na gādhati?* (*Dīghanikāya*, Sutta No. 11).



is: the four primary modes get no footing where **existence has ceased**, or where **consciousness has ceased**. (It should be noted that **cessation** has two phases, and the answer the Buddha gave in this regard involves both phases. We shall be discussing these two phases at length in Chapter XIII, and so shall come back to a further discussion of this answer.)

In the Suttas matter is defined as follows:—

“And what, monks, is matter? The four primary modes of behaviour and the matter that is by holding the four primary modes of behaviour. This, monks, is called matter.”<sup>1</sup>

In the above definition matter is taken in two senses: firstly, in the fundamental sense; and secondly, in the everyday sense with which the *puthujjana*'s existence is concerned.

In the fundamental sense, matter **is** the four primary modes of behaviour which are designated as earthy or solid, watery or cohesive, fiery or ripening and airy or moving. These modes are also referred to as the earth-element, the water-element, the fire-element and the air-element. The word ‘element’ (*dhātu*) is however not used in the sense of a fundamental ingredient. It is used in the same sense that it is used in the phrase the ‘good element’ or the ‘justifiable element’. The Venerable Sāriputta says that a pile of wood, which to the normal individual would be comprised totally of the earth-element, could be perceived by the developed individual as comprised of any one of the four elements or as the beautiful or the ugly element. He says: “Friend, a monk won to supernormal mind power can, if he wishes, view that pile of wood as earth. What is the reason for that? There is, friend, in that pile of wood the earth-element; hence a monk won to supernormal mind power can view that pile of wood as earth. Friend, a monk won to supernormal mind power can, if he wishes, view that pile of wood as water . . . . as

1. *Kāṭamañca bhikkhave rūpaṃ? Cattāro ca mahābhūtā catunnaṃ ca mahābhūtānaṃ upādāya rūpaṃ, idaṃ vuccati bhikkhave rūpaṃ. (Saṃyuttanikāya III, Khandhasaṃyutta, Upāyavagga, Sutta No. 4).*



fire . . . . as air . . . . as beautiful . . . . as ugly. What is the reason for that? There is, friend, in that pile of wood the ugly-element; hence a monk won to supernormal mind power can view that pile of wood as ugly."<sup>1</sup> This gives us an indication of the meaning of the Pali word *dhātu* which we have rendered as 'element'. It also confirms that for an element or behaviour to **exist** as **that** element or behaviour it must be cognized. The Suttas speak of other elements too, such as space-element (*ākāśadhātu*), consciousness-element (*viññāṇadhātu*), pleasure-element (*sukhadhātu*), etc.<sup>2</sup>

"The matter that is by holding the four primary modes of behaviour" is matter in the **everyday** sense, and for the *puṭhujjana*. In this everyday sense, matter would be 'a material object' as against it being, in the fundamental sense, just matter; and in this everyday sense, matter is **dependent upon** the four primary modes of behaviour; that is, in the everyday sense, 'material object' depends upon matter. "Monks, the four primary modes are the cause, the four primary modes are the condition for the manifestation of the aggregate of matter."<sup>3</sup>

Now, the most **important** or significant aggregate of the four primary modes in the everyday sense (or the most important lump of matter), for the individual, and described as **internal** to him, would be 'this body'. In the Suttas the phrase describing it is: "this material body made up of the four primary modes."<sup>4</sup>

1. *Ākaṅkhamāno āvuso bhikkhu iddhiṃ cetovasippatto amuṃ dārukkhandhaṃ paṭhavī tveva adhimucceyya. Taṃ kissa hetu? Atthi āvuso amusmiṃ dārukkhandhe paṭhavidhātu; yaṃ nissāya bhikkhu iddhiṃ cetovasippatto amuṃ dārukkhandhaṃ paṭhavī tveva adhimucceyya. Ākaṅkhamāno āvuso bhikkhu iddhiṃ cetovasippatto amuṃ dārukkhandhaṃ āpo tveva adhimucceyya . . . tejo . . . vāyo . . . subhaṇ . . . asubhaṇ tveva adhimucceyya. Taṃ kissa hetu? Atthi āvuso amusmiṃ dārukkhandhe asubhadhātu; yaṃ nissāya bhikkhu iddhiṃ cetovasippatto amuṃ dārukkhandhaṃ asubhaṇ tveva adhimucceyya. (Aṅguttaranikāya III, Chakkaniṭṭhā, Devatāvagga, Sutta No. 11).*

2. See *Majjhimanikāya*, Sutta No. 115.

3. *Cattāro kho bhikkhu mahābhūtaṃ hetu cattāro mahābhūta paccayo rūpakkhandaṃ paññāpanāya. (Saṃyuttanikāya III, Khandhasaṃyutta, Khajjanīyavagga, Sutta No. 10.)*

4. *Ayaṃ kāyo rūpī cātummahābhūtika. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 74).*



If, however, it is in relation to the *puthujjana's* experience, then it is understood that it would not be just 'this body' but 'this **my** body'. It is then something **held**, something that is **by holding** (*upādāya*), because it would then be something considered as 'for me' or 'mine'. In this way, "the matter that is by holding the four primary modes of behaviour" is the *puthujjana's* body (described as the internal) which he considers as 'I' and 'mine' together with whatever external material objects he so considers; in other words, it is the **holding-aggregate-of-matter** (*rūpupādānakkhandha*). "Whatever matter, monks, be it past, present or future, internal or external, gross or fine, inferior or superior, far or near, is with cankers, has to do with holding,—that is called the holding-aggregate-of-matter."<sup>1</sup>

It is important to note that the word *upādāya*, which in the phrase defining matter in the everyday sense has been translated by us as 'by holding', is used in the Suttas in two senses.

Firstly, and in the simpler sense, it is used to mean 'derived from' or 'because of', or to mean being a 'fuel' for something. In this sense, which has nothing to do with considerations of subjectivity, we get the word *upādāya* used in the phrase *anukampan̄ upādāya*, meaning "taking up sympathy" or "because of sympathy,"<sup>2</sup> and also in the phrase *ayam̄ aggi tīṇakatthupādānam̄ paṭicca jalatīti*, meaning "this fire is burning dependent on taking up grass and sticks."<sup>3</sup>

1. *Yaṃ kiñci bhikkhave rūpaṃ atītānāgatapaccuppaññam̄ ajjhattam̄ vā bahiddhā vā olārikam̄ vā sukhumaṃ vā hīnam̄ vā paṇītam̄ vā yaṃ dūre santike vā sāsavam̄ upādānīyam̄, ayam̄ vuccati rūpupādānakkhandho.* (*Samyuttanikāya III, Attadīpavagga, Sutta No. 6*).

2. *Samyuttanikāya IV, Sālāyatanaṣaṃyutta, Navapurāṇavagga, Sutta No. 1.*

3. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 72.*



Secondly, and by far the more important, it is used to mean 'by holding', which essentially means "by considering as 'I' and 'mine' ". It is in this **subjective** sense that the word is more usually used in the Suttas; and the importance of this word in this sense is to be found in the fact that, as we shall see later on, the problem of suffering and its cessation (which is what the Suttas are dealing with) lies fundamentally and essentially in these considerations of subjectivity.<sup>1</sup>

Since the *puthujjana's* experience is always one of holding, the four primary modes of behaviour or the four (material) elements would be things **held**. So we have the Buddha defining the earth-element (*paṭhavīdhātu*), the water-element (*āpodhātu*), the fire-element (*tejo dhātu*) and the air-element (*vāyodhātu*), in the every day sense, and in relation to the *puthujjana*, as follows:

"And what, monk, is the earth-element? The earth-element may be internal, may be external. And what, monk, is the internal earth-element? Whatever is hard, solid, is internal, held by oneself, that is to say: the hair of the head, the hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow of the bones, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, stomach, excrement, or whatever other thing is hard, solid, is internal, held by oneself—this, monk, is called the internal earth-element. Whatever is the

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1. In the Suttas we do occasionally find the meaning of a word to be rather ambiguous. This ambiguity is born of the elasticity of language particularly when used in dialogue; and of course the Suttas were handed down for five to six centuries from mouth to mouth: These occasional ambiguities in meaning will certainly throw the individual who treats the Suttas as a subject of scholarship into a mess from which he cannot extricate himself though on doubt the existence of a few such ambiguities enhances the importance of his scholarship. But to the individual whose one and only intention is to seek the meaning of the Suttas in his own experience and thereby seek his own welfare these infrequent ambiguities will present no insurmountable problem.



internal earth-element and whatever is the external earth-element, just these are the earth-element . . . .

“And what, monk, is the water-element? The water-element may be internal, may be external. And what, monk, is the internal water-element? Whatever is liquid, is internal, held by oneself, that is to say: bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, serum, saliva, mucus, synovial fluid, urine, or whatever other thing is liquid, become liquid, is internal, held by oneself—this, monk, is called the internal water-element. Whatever is the internal water-element and whatever is the external water-element, just these are the water-element . . . .

“And what, monk, is the fire-element? The fire-element may be internal, may be external. And what, monk, is the internal fire-element? Whatever is heat, become heat, is internal, held by oneself, that is to say: that by which one is heated, and that by which one is consumed, and that by which one is burnt, and that by which what has been munched, drunk, eaten and tasted is fully digested, or whatever other thing is heat, become heat, is internal, held by oneself—this, monk, is called the internal fire-element. Whatever is the internal fire-element and whatever is the external fire-element, just these are the fire-element . . . .

“And what, monk, is the air-element? The air-element may be internal, may be external. And what, monk, is the internal air-element? Whatever is air, become airy, is internal, held by oneself, that is to say: winds going upwards, winds going downwards, winds in the abdomen, winds in the belly, winds permeating the limbs, in-breathing, out-breathing, or whatever other thing is air, become airy, is internal, held by oneself—this, monk, is called the internal air-element. What-



ever is the internal air-element and whatever is the external air-element, just these are the air-element . . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Beyond the above there is practically nothing (according to the Suttas) that the Buddha has taught about matter. One might therefore wonder why he taught so little about it. The reason is simply that the Buddha has a distinct purpose in his Teaching, and elucidations are made by him only in as far as such are necessary for that purpose. He seeks no disinterested approval, intellectual or otherwise, of what he teaches. In fact he taught only after he was invited to teach. "Lord, let the Auspicious One set forth the Teaching, let the Wellfarer set forth the Teaching. There are beings with less defilements, who from not hearing the Teaching are declining."<sup>2</sup> His Teaching is designed to lead one on (*opānaya*) towards a particular goal—the destruction of suffering.

1. *Katamā ca bhikkhu paṭhavīdhātu? Paṭhavīdhātu siyā ajjhāttikā siyā bāhirā. Katamā ca bhikkhu ajjhāttikā paṭhavīdhātu? Yaṃ ajjhāttam paccattam kakkhalam kharigatam upādinnam seyyathidaṃ: kesā lomā nakhā dantā taco maṃsam nahāru atthi atthimiñjā vakkam hadayam yakanam kilomakam pihakam papphāsam antam antagunam udariyam karisam; yaṃ vā pan' aññam pi kiñci ajjhāttam paccattam kakkhalam kharigatam upādinnam; ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhu ajjhāttikā paṭhavīdhātu. Yā c'eva kho pana ajjhāttikā paṭhavīdhātu yā ac bāhirā paṭhavīdhātu paṭhavīdhātur ev'esā . . . .*

*Katamā ca bhikkhu āpodhātu? Āpodhātu siyā ajjhāttikā siyā bāhirā. Katamā ca bhikkhu ajjhāttikā āpodhātu? Yaṃ ajjhāttam paccattam āpo āpogataṃ upādinnam, seyyathidaṃ: pittaṃ semham pubbo lohitaṃ sedo medo assu vasā kheḷo singhānikā lasikā muttam, yaṃ vā pan' aññam pi kiñci ajjhāttam paccattam āpo āpogataṃ upādinnam, ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhu ajjhāttikā āpodhātu. Yā c'eva kho pana ajjhāttikā āpodhātu yā ca bāhirā āpodhātu āpodhātur ev'esā . . . .*

*Katamā ca bhikkhu tejodhātu? Tejodhātu siyā ajjhāttikā siyā bāhirā. Katamā ca bhikkhu ajjhāttikā tejodhātu? Yaṃ ajjhāttam paccattam tejo tejogataṃ upādinnam, seyyathidaṃ: yena ca santappati yena ca janīyati yena ca paridayhati yena ca asitapītakhāyitasāyitam sammāparināmanam gacchati, yaṃ vā pan' aññam pi kiñci ajjhāttam paccattam tejo tejogataṃ upādinnam, ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhu ajjhāttikā tejodhātu. Yā c'eva kho pana ajjhāttikā tejodhātu yā ca bāhirā tejodhātu tejodhātur ev'esā . . . .*

*Katamā ca bhikkhu vāyodhātu? Vāyodhātu siyā ajjhāttikā siyā bāhirā. Katamā ca bhikkhu ajjhāttikā vāyodhātu? Yaṃ ajjhāttam paccattam vāyo vāyogataṃ upādinnam, seyyathidaṃ: uddhaṅgamā vātā adhogamā vātā kucchisayā vātā koṭṭha sayā vātā angamaṅgānusārino vātā assāso passāso, yaṃ vā pan' aññam pi kiñci ajjhāttam paccattam vāyo vāyogataṃ upādinnam, ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhu ajjhāttikā vāyodhātu. Yā c'eva kho pana ajjhāttikā vāyodhātu yā ca bāhirā vāyodhātu vāyodhātur ev'esā . . . . (Majjhimanikāya Sutta No. 140).*

2. *Desetu bhante bhagavā dhammam, desetu sugato dhammam. Santi sattā apparakkhajātikā assavanatā dhammassa parihāyanti. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 26).*



The analysis of matter given by the Buddha is sufficient. No further analyses are essential in order to solve the problem of suffering. What **is** essential is to understand that the analysis given by the Buddha is sufficient.

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We are now left with the fourth aggregate—the aggregate of determinations (*saṅkhārā*).

“And what, monks, are determinations? It is these six bodies-of-intention (*cetanākāyā*); intention with regard to sight, intention with regard to sound, intention with regard to smell, intention with regard to taste, intention with regard to touch, intention with regard to images. These, monks, are called determinations.”<sup>1</sup>

That means to say, in the context of the five aggregates *saṅkhārā* refer to the entire body-of-intentions. But we rendered *saṅkhārā* as **determinations**. This then needs justification.

For a start, we shall discuss the phenomenon of intention; and then we shall proceed to the question of why we render *saṅkhārā* as ‘determinations’—a word that is broader in meaning than ‘intentions’.

Let us consider an experience.

The **positive** aspects in the experience would be colour, shape, smell, etc. These may also be called the actual aspects. But these aspects **alone** do not define it as a **particular thing**. In order to be a particular thing it has first to be distinguished

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1. *Katamā ca bhikkhave saṅkhārā? Chayime bhikkhave cetanākāyā: rūpasāñcetanā, saddasāñcetanā, gandhasāñcetanā, rasasāñcetanā, phoṭṭhabbasāñcetanā, dhammasāñcetanā. Ime vuccanti bhikkhave saṅkhārā. (Saṃyuttanikāya III, Khandhasamyutta, Upāyavagga, Sutta No. 4.)*



from all **other** things; and those other things are what the particular thing is **not**. But being different to all other things does not yet define it as **that** particular thing. To get so defined it must also point to what it **signifies**, to what its **possibilities** are, to what its **potentialities** are. These significances or possibilities which are **not** the thing are the **negative** aspects of the thing. Now those positive **and** negative aspects by which the particular thing gets determined or defined as that particular thing and no other are the **determinations** (*saṅkhārā*) of the particular thing, the word determinations being taken in its broadest sense. In this way, the experience 'seeing a book' is determined **not only** by the positive aspects of colour, shape, smell, etc. **but also** by the negative aspects of 'for reading' or 'for adorning the bookshelf'.

In this way, in an experience, the positive and the negative go hand in hand. The negatives ('reading' or 'adorning the bookshelf'), it may be noted, are images which are given together with the positives (colour, smell, rigidity, etc.). When I see the book these images are automatically present due to past experiences and observations. But if I am faced with something unfamiliar—i.e. with something I have had no experience of, and therefore the present images arisen in association with it are insufficient to determine what exactly it is—then an act of inference is necessary if I am to determine what precisely it is. And for this I have to set about the complicated task of **thinking** about it. But even in such a case, the insufficiency or inadequacy of the images that get associated with the sight (or smell, etc.) of the unfamiliar thing is enough to determine the thing immediately as 'an unknown object to be treated with care'. This means that even when we resort to inference in order to determine what a thing precisely is, it has **already** been determined as 'an unknown object to be treated with care' by the negatives (images), insufficient though they be, which are **given in the immediate experience together with the positive aspects**.



However, all negatives do not get equally emphasized in an experience. And if we return to our experience of 'seeing a book', the experience is 'seeing a book' and not 'seeing a pile of papers' because the negative aspects 'for reading' or 'for adorning the bookshelf' are more prominent or emphasized than the other negatives like 'for wrapping things with'. From this it also follows that we know what a thing is when we know what it is **for**.

Now, of these determinations that determine the particular thing, the determinations that are the **negative** aspects are what in the strictest philosophical sense is called **intentions**, or **significances**. This is why the Suttas define *saṅkhārā* in the context of the aggregates as 'bodies-of-intention' (*cetanākāyā*).

Thus, an experience is the sum total of the positives—i.e. the aggregates of matter, feeling, perception and consciousness—**and** the negatives—i.e. the aggregate of determinations (in this context, intentions). In other words, an experience is the totality of **five** aggregates. This means, in brief, that things are present with their significances or potentialities; that is, when they are present, they are present transcending the actual. This is the essence of intentionality, and **all consciousness is intentional, at least incipiently**.

Here itself let us note that, from the point of view of the problem of suffering, the most important and dominating intention (or significance) of a thing is that it is 'mine' or 'for me'—an intention that is structurally tied up with the perceptions of pleasurableness and permanence. And further, it is in this ubiquitous or ever present intention 'for me' that we are primarily interested and not in the thing's other intentions (possible uses). Now, this negative (or intention) 'for me' (or 'for I') has a very important aspect, an aspect that is due to the **ubiquitous** nature of the negative itself, or in other words, due to its being **always** present or tending to be present, whatever there is consciousness of. This ubiquitous nature of the negative 'for me' leads the thinker to the conclusion that there is an 'I' (or 'me') existing independently of all experience. In other words, there **appears** to be a



**positive** actual 'I'. In this way there is a negative which appears to be positive. Thus there is an ambiguity, and since it is an ambiguity concerned with the very essence of existence, it is an existential ambiguity—nay, it is **the** existential ambiguity.

We now come to the question of what is referred to as 'action'.

Now, so long as attention (*manasikāra*)—and attention may be described as 'direction of emphasis'—is being kept on 'seeing a book' the negative aspects such as 'for reading' and 'for adorning the bookshelf' remain negative, i.e. they remain only possibilities, not actual. But with reflexion these possibilities appear **as** possible and consequently the actual aspect appears **optional**. There is now exercise of **preference**, or exercise of **choice**; that is to say, whether to keep seeing the book or read the book or adorn the bookshelf. This exercise of preference is **action** in its simplest form. It is also **volition** in its simplest form. It can also be called **intending an intention**, or **intentional intention**. It is to denote this intentional intention that in common usage the single word intention is used. Ethically significant action is intentional action (intended intention) that is related to the problem of what should 'I' do. This is the basic problem that concerns ethics; and whether that 'what should I do' is 'good' or 'bad' or 'moral' or 'immoral', etc. it is necessarily something that 'I' should do; it is intentional action accompanied with notions of subjectivity. And the Pali word *kamma* refers to this ethically significant action; in other words, to intentional action wherein the intentions 'mine' or 'for me' are **always** present to some degree or other. That is why, concerning the non-arāhat, the Buddha describes 'intention' (intended intention) as 'action' (ethically significant action): "Intention, monks, I declare is action."—*cetanāhaṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi*.<sup>1</sup> (The next sentence in this Sutta passage is: "Having intended, one does action through body, speech and mind"—*cetayitvā kammaṃ karoti kāyena vācāya manasā*. This latter sentence points to the

1. *Anguttaranikāya III, Chakkanipāta, Mahāvagga, Sutta No. 9.*



second layer of action. The 'having intended' refers to the intending the intention which as we have pointed out is action at its first and simplest level. The action done as a result of this 'having intended' is the level of action that follows and makes the action assume a larger perspective.)

With the question of selection (or choice) is involved the question of **what** actually decides selection. What decides whether it is this intention or that intention that should be intended? The answer to this question is of much importance; and its importance lies in the fact that, in the first place, it makes the *puthujjana* see that his ideas regarding his own actions are rather unsound and not as noble and selfless as he often imagines them to be. What decides the choice for him is the perception of pleasure and unpleasure pure and simple. Of all the intentions present that can **now** be intended by him, that which he intends is just that which he thinks will afford him the highest degree of pleasure now or in the near future. All the intentional actions of the *puthujjana*, from the most deliberate to the most thoughtless, and without exception, are determined by this perception of pleasure and unpleasure. Even what he pompously calls his 'duty' is included in this law. If he does his duty, that is only because he should feel unpleasure if he neglected it, and he seeks to avoid unpleasure. Even when he renounces a present pleasure, he does so for the sake of what he thinks will be a greater pleasure in the future.

Some degree of reflexion is always involved when there is action. At its lowest level, however, we may call it 'tendency' or 'inclination'. At this level the action is irrevocable, but it can be modified or toned down by reflexion of a higher order, i.e. if I become **aware** of the action that I have **already** engaged in due to my tendency. But the choice of action may also be made deliberately, in which case it is revocable. The common and convenient idea that our tendencies are impulses to which we can only submit (as an inanimate thing gives in to the pressure applied on it) is mistaken. Far from being an impulse that must be passively suffered, a tendency is



an active seeking to determine what is yet only an undetermined state of affairs. The state of affairs sought by a tendency is **always** one that is already pregnant in the present state of affairs, which is not the case with a voluntary intention. When it is late in the night I have the tendency to sleep, but not to run. My situation is then actually pregnant with falling asleep, and the intention to fall asleep is immediate, involuntary. But to run I have to voluntarily intend running, and make a deliberate effort to run; running is not a state of affairs that my situation at the time is pregnant with. (This example is at a rather crude level, but will serve to indicate the difference between tendency and voluntary intention (or volition)). When psychology makes tendency a state of **fact**, psychology deprives tendency of its essential character—the character of **appetite**—and hence also of its modifiability.

It may be noted that the phenomenon called attention (*manasikāra*) which we referred to earlier is an important phenomenon that is always present in the intentional structure. We have defined it as direction of emphasis. It means that from amidst all the intentions present, there is an emphasis placed on one more than on the others. When the book is used, one among the intentions is attended to at the expense of the others. It cannot be used for both reading and adorning the bookshelf, since for reading it has to be opened and for adorning it has to be closed. Quite clearly, when there is attention there is intentional (or voluntary) intention, and there is no consciousness without at least incipient attention. Attention can be regarded as being essentially reflexive, though it may be argued that in the structure of immediate experience there is both intention and attention, at least incipient, and which may be termed immediate intention and immediate attention.

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Let us now proceed to examine the justification for our rendering the word *saṅkhārā* as 'determinations'.

For this purpose we shall consider three outstanding instances of the usage of this word in the Suttas.

(1) It is the name given to the fourth aggregate—*saṅkhārak-khandha*. This fourth aggregate is again defined as 'bodies-of-intention' (*cetanākāyā*). Thus, in the context of the five aggregates, *saṅkhārā* are synonymous with 'intentions' (*cetanā*). (By *cetanā*, i.e. by 'intention' here, is meant both intention and intended intention.)

(2) In the doctrine of dependent-arising (the *paṭiccasamuppāda*) the word *saṅkhāra* occurs in *saṅkhārapaccayā viññāṇaṃ*—"with *saṅkhārā* as condition, consciousness"—; and in this context it is defined as follows:

"What, monks, are the *saṅkhārā*? These are the three *saṅkhārā*: the body-*saṅkhāra*, the speech-*saṅkhāra*, the mind-*saṅkhāra*. These, monks, are called the *saṅkhārā*."<sup>1</sup>

The *Majjhimanikāya*, *Sutta No. 44*, tells us what these three varieties of *saṅkhārā* refer to and why those things referred to are called *saṅkhārā*:

"Indeed, friend Visākha, the in-and-out breaths are body-*saṅkhāra*, thinking-and-pondering are speech-*saṅkhāra*, perception and feeling are mind-*saṅkhāra*."

"But why, lady, are the in-and-out breaths body-*saṅkhāra*, why are thinking-and-pondering speech-*saṅkhāra*, why are perception and feeling mind-*saṅkhāra*?"

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1. *Katame ca bhikkhave saṅkhārā? Tayome bhikkhave saṅkhārā: kāyasaṅkhāro vacīsaṅkhāro cittasaṅkhāro, ime vuccanti bhikkhave saṅkhārā.* (*Samyuttanikāya II, Abhisamayasaṃyutta, Buddhavagga, Sutta No. 2*).



"Indeed, friend Visākha, the in-and-out breaths are bodily, these things are bound up with the body; that is why the in-and-out breaths are body-*saṅkhāra*. Indeed, friend Visākha, first having thought and pondered, afterwards one breaks into speech; that is why thinking-and-pondering are speech-*sankhāra*. Perception and feeling are mental, these things are bound up with the mind; that is why perception and feeling are mind-*saṅkhāra*."<sup>1</sup>

Now, thinking-and-pondering (*vitakkavicārā*) and feeling and perception (*saññā ca vedanā ca*) are **intentional**; and that means speech-*saṅkhāra* and mind-*saṅkhāra* are things intentional. How about the in-and-out breaths which are the body-*saṅkhāra*? As a matter of fact in-and-out breaths **are** intentional, in the sense that breathing is a conscious act, though not necessarily a deliberate act or an act of awareness; and all conscious action is intentional. The proof that in-and-out breaths are intentional is that if we stop our breathing for a few seconds we shall experience a tremendous intention to breathe developing in us that will compel us to resume the breathing. This intention is there all the time, though to a lesser degree, but as long as we breathe freely we do not observe it. As against this, if our blood circulation has stopped in some part of our body we experience a pain or numbness, but that cannot be described as an intention to circulate blood.

Incidentally, there is another triad of *sankhārā* found in the Suttas, called *kāyasaṅkhāra—vacīsaṅkhāra—manosaṅkhāra* (**not**

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1. *Assāsapassāsā kho āvuso Visākha kāyasaṅkhāro, vitakkavicārā vacīsaṅkhāro, saññā ca vedanā ca cittasaṅkhāroti.*

*Kasmā pañeyya assāsapassāsā Kāyasaṅkhāro? Kasmā vitakkavicārā vacīsaṅkhāro? Kasmā saññā ca vedanā ca cittasaṅkhāroti?*

*Assāsapassāsā kho āvuso Visākha kāyikā ete dhammā kāyapaṭibaddhā; tasmā assāsapassāsā kāyasaṅkhāro. Pubbe kho āvuso Visākha vitakketvā vicāretvā pacchā vācam bhindati; tasmā vitakkavicārā vacīsaṅkhāro. Saññā ca vedanā ca cetasikā, ete dhammā cittapaṭibaddhā; tasmā saññā ca vedanā ca cittasaṅkhāroti. (Majjhima-nikāya Sutta No. 44.)*



*cittasaṅkhāra*).<sup>1</sup> This triad, as indicated in the *Samyuttanikāya II, Abhisamayasaṃyutta, Dasabalavagga, Sutta No. 5*, is identical to the triad *kāyasañcetanā—vacīsañcetanā—manosañcetanā*. These two triads simply distinguish intentional action by body, speech and mind.

Now, the above comments regarding the meaning of the triad *kāyasaṅkhāra—vacīsaṅkhāra—cittasaṅkhāra* mentioned in the doctrine of dependent-arising indicate that, in the context of this doctrine, *saṅkhāra* refer to things intentional, though not to intention itself. **Sometimes**, however, as for instance in the *Samyuttanikāya II, Abhisamayasaṃyutta, Dukkha-vagga, Sutta No. 1*, the *saṅkhāra* of this doctrine **do** refer to intention. (It is important that we have this position in mind when we come to the doctrine of dependent-arising, particularly because the traditional three-life interpretation of this doctrine—which is also the Commentarial interpretation—wrongly assumes that the *saṅkhāra* of this doctrine refer exclusively to intention.)

(3) In the *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 43*, heat is called life-*saṅkhāra* (*āyusaṅkhāra*), as that upon which life depends: “life stands dependent upon heat”—*āyuusmaṃ paṭicca tiṭṭhatīti*.

Quite clearly, in this case, *saṅkhāra* has nothing to do with intention. It merely refers to some thing upon which some other thing depends (*paṭicca*).

All this brings home two facts:

(i) The word *saṅkhāra* is used in the Suttas to refer not only to intention but to other things as well. It is used to refer (a) to intention, (b) to things that are intentional, and (c) to neither intention nor to things intentional.

(ii) The Pali words *paṭibaddha* (bound up with) and *paṭicca* (dependent upon) indicate that whatever is referred to as a *saṅkhāra*, that is some thing which some **other** thing depends upon or is intimately connected to.

1. The precise meaning of *citta* has to be determined separately in each context. It can mean mind, consciousness, cognition, heart, reflexive experience, etc. Sometimes it is synonymous with *mano*.



These two facts provide us the justification to render *saṅkhāra* as 'determination' and not as 'intention'. The word 'intention' is not sufficient to cover **all** uses of the word *saṅkhāra* in the Suttas, but this one word 'determination' covers all uses of it therein. (Another suitable word is 'determinant'). All intentions are determinations, that is to say, they are things that determine other things; but all determinations are not intentions.

If we render the word *saṅkhāra* as 'determination' (or 'determinant') we will find that this rendering fits all instances of the use of this word in the Suttas whilst giving to it its appropriate meaning. In fact, in the *Samyuttanikāya III, Khandhasamyutta, Khajjanīyavagga, Sutta No. 7*, the Buddha tells us why the fourth aggregate, which is the body (or aggregate) of intentions, is called the aggregate of *saṅkhāra*. If we translate the word *saṅkhāra* as determination, and all the words derived from it in accordance, the relevant passage in this Sutta when translated into English will run as follows:

"And what, monks, do you say are determinations? They determine the determined; that is why, monks, they are called determinations. And what is the determined that they determine? Matter as matter is the determined that they determine. Feeling as feeling is the determined that they determine. Perception as perception is the determined that they determine. Determinations as determinations are the determined that they determine. Consciousness as consciousness is the determined that they determine. They determine the determined; that indeed, monks, is why they are called determinations."<sup>1</sup>

1. *Kiñca bhikkhave saṅkhāre vadetha? Saṅkhatam abhisankharontīti bhikkhave tasmā saṅkhārā ti vuccanti. Kiñca saṅkhatam abhisankharonti? Rūpam rūpattāya saṅkhatam abhisankharonti, vedanam vedanattāya saṅkhatam abhisankharonti, saññam saññattāya saṅkhatam abhisankharonti, saṅkhāre saṅkhārattāya saṅkhatam abhisankharonti, viññānam viññānattāya saṅkhatam abhisankharonti. Saṅkhatam abhisankharontīti kho bhikkhave tasmā saṅkhārā ti vuccanti. (Samyuttanikāya III, Khandhasamyutta, Khajjanīyavagga, Sutta No. 7.*



A determination (*saṅkhāra*) can also be called a **necessary condition**, or it can be called **a thing upon which some other thing depends**, and it is very important that what is meant by it is distinctly understood. It means that whatever thing depends upon this determination, that thing can exist **only if** this determination is present. The thing cannot be present without the determination being present, for the determination is the **necessary** condition without which the thing cannot be. If the determination is absent then the thing is also absent. It should **not** be understood as 'once the determination has come and gone the thing arises'; nor must it be understood as 'the determination becomes the thing'. There is no temporal succession wherein one comes into being with the disappearance of the other, as for example the various items of the *cittavīthi* do. If the determination is gone, the thing determined by the determination is also gone. In other words, if the necessary condition is gone the thing conditioned by the condition is also gone. This is a **structural** principle.

It is of great importance to note that the determination (*saṅkhāra*) does not refer to the thing (*dhmma*) that is determined (*saṅkhata*) by the said determination. This thing that is determined by the determination is called the 'determined thing' (*saṅkhata dhmma*). Any determined thing is, however, **of the nature of determination**. In Pali terms, any *saṅkhata dhmma* is of the nature of *saṅkhāra*. That is to say, any determined thing is in turn the determination for some **other** determined thing. For example, the six internal bases are the determinations for contact; contact cannot be there unless the six internal bases are there, and therefore, here, the six internal bases are the determinations and contact is the determined thing. But again, contact, which is thus a determined thing, is the determination for something else, viz., feeling. Without contact, no feeling. So that contact, as a determined thing, is also a determination dependent upon which stands feeling. That is what is meant by saying that any determined thing is of the nature of a determination. Further, any determination is also a determined thing that is determined by **other**



determinations. Contact is the determination for feeling, and in its turn contact is a determined thing determined by the six internal bases. These two situations form one of the causes for the immense confusion there is with regard to these two words *saṅkhāra* and *saṅkhata*. *Saṅkhāra* (determination, or determinant) is very often taken to mean 'the determined' or 'the conditioned' or 'the formed', etc., all of which actually refer to *sankhata*. Invariably one sees that important statement *sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā* translated as 'All conditioned things are impermanent' when it should be translated as 'All things that determine other things are impermanent' or as 'All (necessary) conditions are impermanent' or as 'All determinations are impermanent'. *Saṅkhāra* is a key word in the Suttas, and when in this fashion it is wrongly taken to mean what is meant by the word *sankhata* it will be found that, apart from misunderstanding the Suttas, these Suttas are deprived of a portion of their leading on character.

One other matter regarding *saṅkhāra*: within the ambit of the structural principle we have indicated there are two variations of the temporal relation-ship between the determinations and their correspondingly determined things. These are:

(1) Certain determinations and their correspondingly determined things exist, whenever they exist, **only together**. That is to say, the determination (*saṅkhāra*) and the determined thing (*saṅkhata dhamma*) arise together, persist together, and cease together. We will come across such pairs as we go along.

(2) Other determinations can exist without the correspondingly determined things, but if the determined things are to exist the determinations must also exist. Two examples are: (a) perception and knowledge, (b) thinking-and-pondering and speech. There can be perception without knowledge, but if knowledge is to be there perception must also be there. Perception comes first, and knowledge comes thereafter with perception **still present** as the determination. Similarly, there can be thinking-and-pondering without speech, but if speech is to be there thinking-and-pondering must also be



there. Here too, thinking-and-pondering comes first and speech comes thereafter with thinking-and-pondering still present as the determination.

The common feature in both these cases is the structural principle; that is, the principle that if the determined thing is to be there the determination must also be there. And the two temporal variations pointed out occur with this structural principle holding good in either case. In short, whether or not the determination can exist without its correspondingly determined thing, that determined thing **cannot** exist without the determination also existing.

Lastly, we have to point out that it is of vital importance to remember what has been said about this word *saṅkhāra*—what precisely it refers to, its usage in the Suttas, and the attendant implications. Quite a lot of the fanciful interpretations of the Buddha's Teaching stems from a misunderstanding of the meaning of this word and the manner in which it is used in the Suttas. No doubt it is not an easy word to sort out, but once its precise meaning is established, it presents no difficulty thereafter.



## CHAPTER VI

### NAME-AND-MATTER AND CONSCIOUSNESS

We may now proceed to consider in some detail the general structure of an experience.

My present experience is that **seated on the chair I am conscious of the bottle of ink** which is in front of me. That means I am seated on a chair and there is a lump of matter called 'bottle of ink' of which I am conscious.

But this is a description of my present situation, or of my present experience, in **everyday** language. Closer examination of this experience, however, reveals a state of affairs that is rather alien to this everyday manner of thinking and speaking.

Now, it is not difficult to see that this experience of mine is really a my being conscious of some perceptions (black colour, a certain shape), some feelings (pleasant bodily feeling by reason of the sitting, a pleasant mental feeling that the bottle has sufficient ink in it), and some determinations (intention to drip the pen in it, etc.). And of course, to be conscious of these feelings, perceptions and determinations, apart from the matter that constitutes my own body, that lump of matter called 'bottle of ink' must also be present.

In this way any experience can be analysed into the five-holding-aggregates. We do note, however, that in an experience, each and every one of the holding-aggregates in its **totality** is not explicit. For instance, the entire aggregate of perception, viz., sight—, sound—, smell—, taste—, touch—, and idea-perception may not be explicit. So also with the aggregate of feeling. But we do see quite clearly that in an experience there is matter, there is feeling, there is perception, there are determinations and there is consciousness, though we may not see that in the said experience there is feeling, perception, and consciousness sprung from **all** the six bases. In any case we can refer to an experience as being a set of five-holding-aggregates; and each fresh experience is a fresh set.



It is misleading to regard a part of the experience as being 'in me' whilst another part as being 'in the object'. 'I see a book'—that is the experience; and were this experience not to occur there would be no **book** and no **I**. Since both **book** and **I** depend on the occurrence of the experience, we have to give priority to the experience. The true situation is: 'there is experience of my seeing a book'; and this experience can be analysed into the five-holding-aggregates. Note that the constituents are the five-**holding**-aggregates and not five aggregates. That is because subjectivity is present—'I see a book.'

Thus any experience can be described as a being conscious of the four aggregates of matter, feeling, perception and determinations. (We are not taking into account what the Buddha refers to as experience in the *arūpa* ('immaterial' spheres)). Since holding is also present the experience is further described as being with holding (*sa-upādāna*). This holding—i.e. this considering as 'I' and 'mine'—being involved as it is with the primary significance or intention in the experience, it can be classified primarily within the aggregate of determinations; but of course it envelops all the aggregates.

Further examination of the experience reveals that the totality of the three aggregates of feeling, perception, and determinations is really the **manner** in which I am conscious of matter. We may therefore call this totality of feeling, perception, and determinations as the **appearance** of matter—the word 'appearance' being taken in a wide sense, and not limited to the visual only. For this reason it is very convenient for us to consider the three aggregates of feeling, perception, and determinations as a whole; and as a whole they are referred to as *nāma*, which may be rendered as **name** rather than as **appearance**. The four aggregates of matter, feeling, perception, and determinations would then be name-and-matter (*nāmarūpa*); and any experience would then be name-and-matter and consciousness (*nāmarūpa saha viññāna*).

It should be noted that our usage of the word 'appearance' (as against 'behaviour' or 'substance') and our usage of the



word 'reality' have nothing to do with the fictitious distinctions between **Appearance** and **Reality** of Bradley, Kant and company. Appearance is also something real; it **is there**. And the view that there is a Reality **behind** or **beyond** Appearance is most misleading. What is misleading or wrong in it is that it assumes a reality **behind** or **beyond** things and therefore also entirely independent of the individual's consciousness. A reality is an **existence**, and any existence is always **within** the sphere of consciousness, it is tied up with it, for existence is always **existence in some form**, and this 'in some form' is an involvement with consciousness. I cannot find anything existing that has not in anyway anything to do with **my** consciousness; so cannot the other man. Any existent thing for me must be concerned with at least my imagination. (This is precisely why matter (*rūpa*) or behaviour cannot be said to **exist** as a **by itself**. Matter is that which **presents** itself **as** matter, and this **presence as matter**—which is exactly the same as **existence of matter**—is something that is tied up with my consciousness). Phenomena or appearances are there **just as they are**, and they can be observed and described just as they are, though certainly they may not be obvious or simple. Kant says it is a scandal of philosophy and of human reason in general that there is still no cogent proof for the 'being-there of things outside of us' that will do away with all scepticism. Heidegger calls the bluff by remarking that "The 'scandal of philosophy' is not that this proof has yet to be given, but that **such proofs are expected and attempted again and again**."<sup>1</sup> When the false spurious problems of the 'external world' or of the so-called 'objective reality' independent of the perceiver are done away with, materialism is also done away with, though matter is not. (It is this futile quest for such an 'objective reality' that has, in the final analysis, rendered the philosophies of those like Kant so meaningless and divorced from actual experience.

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1. *Being and Time*, p. 249 (translation by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson.)



As it must happen in such a quest, they posit a 'pure original unchangeable consciousness' or some such thing in order that they might get one step nearer this 'objective reality' which would be identically the same at all times and for all. But such a consciousness is a contradiction, simply because consciousness and individuality are one. It is a mysticism in that it claims to go over and above the individual's consciousness—a (transcendental apperception').<sup>1</sup>

The Buddha defines name (*nāma*) as follows: "Feeling, perception, intention, contact, attention,—this is called name."<sup>2</sup> This means that, in this definition, intention, contact and attention are as a whole taken to represent determinations. The justification for it lies (1) in that perception directly involves contact (which, as we have seen, is the coming together of the pair of bases for consciousness and the particular kind of consciousness involved—e.g. eye, sight and eye-consciousness), and (2) in that the fourth aggregate called determinations, as intention, includes attention for attention is structurally inseparable from intention.

A very common error is the assumption that *nāmarūpa* refers to "mind-and-matter". *Rūpa* certainly refers to matter. But from the foregoing it should be quite clear that *nāma* is **not** mind. And tied up with this erroneous assumption is the other erroneous assumption (promoted by some of the exegetical books) that name (*nāma*) includes consciousness (*viññāna*). Name does **not** include consciousness; it only **entails** it. An experience is not only name-and-matter; it is name-and-matter **and** consciousness. In Pali terms, an experience is not only *nāmarūpa*, it is *nāmarūpa saha viññāna*,<sup>3</sup> the word *saha* meaning 'and' or 'together with'.

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1. Note the subtle theological disposition.

2. *Vedanā saññā cetanā phasso manasikāro, idaṃ vuccati nāmaṃ.* (*Samyuttanikāya*, II, *Abhisamayasaṃyutta*, *Buddhavagga*, *Sutta No 2.*)

3. *Dīghanikāya*, *Sutta No. 15.*



The totality of the feelings, perceptions, and determinations present when one is conscious of the material object A is different from that when one is conscious of the material object B. In other words, name (*nāma*) will not be identical in both cases, though of course the general structure will be the same. Therefore we distinguish the two by giving two different **designations** (*adhivacana*) to them. (We can also use the word 'name' in its common meaning for this). Thus designation actually pertains to name (*nāma*). But since name (*nāma*) is the appearance of the object, we refer to the object by this designation. The 'book' is really a designation given to a particular appearance (i.e. to a particular name (*nāma*)); and this appearance is the appearance of a particular lump of matter (*rūpa*). It is in this indirect manner—indirect, in that it is by way of name (*nāma*)—that we designate the lump of matter as 'book'. (Note that if the intentions present are different name (*nāma*) will be different and hence designation will be different,—perhaps, a 'pile of papers'.)

In this way, we get two, so to say, cross-wise states of affairs with regard to name (*nāma*) and matter (*rūpa*). They can be formulated as follows:

(1) Since matter has the characteristic of inertia (or persistence), its appearance is seen to persist or remain the same. In other words, since matter (*rūpa*) has the characteristic of inertia (*patigha*), we discern in name (*nāma*) an inertia.

(2) Since appearance has some particular designation, its substance—i.e. the matter which when cognized gives this appearance—is seen to have a designation. In other words, since name (*nāma*) has the characteristic of designation (*adhivacana*), we discern in matter (*rūpa*) a designation.

In the Suttas (1) is referred to as "inertia in name-body" (*nāmakāye patigha*)<sup>1</sup> and (2) is referred to as "designation in matter-body" (*rūpakāye adhvācāna*)<sup>2</sup>.

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1. *Dīghanikāya*, Sutta No. 15.

2. *Ibid.*



Also, we get: (a) inertia is a characteristic of matter, and matter is behaviour—i.e. the four primary modes of behaviour—; therefore inertia is a characteristic of behaviour; (b) name (*nāma*) is also the appearance of matter, and that means it is the appearance of behaviour. Accordingly, “inertia in name-body” corresponds to “behaviour of appearance” and “designation in matter-body” corresponds to “appearance of behaviour.” And in experience we do see that there is a **behaviour of appearance** and an **appearance of behaviour**. We see that appearance behaves and that behaviour appears. The appearance of the clock behaves in a certain fashion, and the behaviour of the clock appears in a certain fashion.

All this indicates to us why in experience we cannot speak of matter (*rūpa*) without name (*nāma*) or of name without matter. We can only speak of their combination, which is called name-and-matter (*nāmarūpa*). And again, we cannot speak of an experience in terms of name-and-matter only. It is always: name-and-matter and consciousness.

Now, matter is both internal (*ajjhaticca*) to the individual and external (*bāhira*) to him; and since name-and-matter is cognized matter we can have two kinds of name-and-matter. Also since in one and the same experience we can cognize both internal matter and external matter, in one and the same experience we can have both kinds of name-and-matter. The first, i.e. the internal, and also the more important kind, would be ‘this cognized body of mine’, and the second, i.e. the external, would be the cognized matter just now around me. In this way we find a dyad of name-and-matter. “So there is just this body and name-and-matter externally. In this way there is a dyad.”<sup>1</sup> (Note that ‘body’ (*kāya*) is the designation for the cognized internal matter)). The position then is that when we say our experience is name-and-matter and consciousness, in this statement we reckon name-and-matter as the **total**

1. *Iti ayaṃ ca eva kāyo bahiddhā ca nāmarūpaṃ, ittha etaṃ dvayaṃ.*  
(*Samyuttanikāya II, Abhisamayāsamyutta, Āhāravagga, Sutta No. 9*)



cognized matter, i.e. the cognized internal matter and the cognized external matter. Example: 'I am sitting on this chair in this room writing'. Thus not only am I cognizing my own body (which is the internal) but also the matter around me (which is the external). This means that, ultimately, I am not concerned with just myself pure and simple, but with **myself as determined by my whole situation**. And this 'myself as determined by my whole situation' is also, at that particular time, 'my world'. Further, we note that it is spatio-temporal.

From the analysis of an experience we have made so far it is not difficult to see a most important characteristic of the relationship that lies between name-and-matter and consciousness. This characteristic can be described as one of **simultaneity**—a characteristic of which we shall have to speak more later on. Name-and-matter and consciousness arise **simultaneously, or together**; likewise they cease together. That means **between** the two there is no time lapse. As against this, for example, between in-breathing and out-breathing there is a time lapse, since one precedes or follows the other in time. In-breathing and out-breathing are therefore "involving time" (*kālika*). With name-and-matter and consciousness the position is that if one is there, so is the other. Indeed it cannot be otherwise, purely because an experience constitutes **both** name-and-matter and consciousness.

The Buddha points out the above relationship between name-and-matter and consciousness thus:

"In what being there, is name-and-matter there? Dependent on what is there name-and-matter?"<sup>1</sup>

The answer is:

"In consciousness being there, name-and-matter is there. Dependent on consciousness there is name-and-matter."<sup>2</sup>

1. *Kimhi nu kho sati nāmarūpaṃ hoti, kiṃ paṇṇāpaccayā nāmarūpaṃ ti. (Dīghanikāya, Sutta No. 14)*

2. *Viññāṇe kho sati nāmarūpaṃ hoti, viññāṇapaccayā nāmarūpaṃ ti. (Ibid).*



And:

"In what being there, is consciousness there? Dependent on what is there consciousness?"<sup>1</sup>

The answer is:

"In name-and-matter being there, consciousness is there. Dependent on name-and-matter there is consciousness."<sup>2</sup>

Further, the Buddha says, "This consciousness turns back from name-and-matter; it does not go beyond."<sup>3</sup>

So we see that consciousness is that which determines name-and-matter, and name-and-matter is that which determines consciousness. Thus, one is the determination (*sankhāra*) for the other. And since one is the other's determination the relationship between them is one of simultaneity. They arise together, they persist together, and they cease together; there is a total-either-way-simultaneity between them, a reciprocal dependence.

Thus we see that inasmuch as any experience is purely a matter of name-and-matter and consciousness, wherein one is the determination for the other, the whole of life runs its course as being purely a matter of name-and-matter together with consciousness, with the qualification that in the case of the *puthujjana* with whom only we have been so far concerned, it is with holding.

"Thus far, Ananda, one may be born or age or die or fall or arise, thus far there is way of designation, thus far there is way of language, thus far there is way of description, thus far there is the sphere of understanding, thus far the round proceeds as manifestation in a situation—so far, that is to say, as there is name-and-matter together with consciousness."<sup>4</sup>

1. *kimhi nu kho sati viññāṇaṃ hoti, kiṃpaccayā viññāṇaṃ it.* (*Dīghanikāya, Sutta No. 14*).

2. *Nāmarūpe kho sati viññāṇaṃ hoti, nāmarūpappaccayā viññāṇaṃ ti.* (*Ibid*).

3. *Paccudāvattati kho idaṃ viññāṇaṃ nāmarūpaṃhā, nāparaṃ gacchati.* (*Ibid*).

4. *Ettāvatā kho Ananda jāyetha vā jinetha vā mīyetha vā cavetha vā uppajjetha vā ettāvatā adhivacanapatho, ettāvatā niruttipatho, ettāvatā paññattipatho, ettāvatā paññāvacaraṃ, ettāvatā vaṭṭaṃ vattatiitthattaṃ paññāpanāya, yadidaṃ nāmarūpaṃ saha viññāṇena.* (*Dīghanikāya, Sutta No. 15*)



## CHAPTER VII

### ‘MY SELF’

We now come to a very important characteristic of the five-holding-aggregates, viz., the constant pressure for recognition as a **self** (*attā*), or as a **soul**.

The notion of self (or soul) is the notion of a **selfsame subject**; and the notion ‘my self’ (*me attā*), is the notion of a ‘selfsame I’, of an ‘eternal I’, of an ‘I’ that **remains unchanged in time eternally**. And just as much as ‘I’ is **master** over the object, the notion of ‘eternal I’—that is to say, the notion of self—is fundamentally a notion of permanent mastery (*vasa*)<sup>1</sup>. It means that what is considered to be self is assumed to behave in the manner required **by itself of itself**, and for **all** time. Self (or soul, ego, etc.) refers to an irreplaceable subject that is **beyond change**, and therefore also extra-temporal—an unmoved mover, a kind of absolute timelessness, or a closed up eternity within itself. **To be a self would be to be a being that is its own foundation, and as such could not suffer the slightest discrepancy between what it is and what it conceives, for it would produce itself entirely in conformity with its conception of being and could conceive only what its being is.** “If, monks, this matter .....feeling.....perception.....determinations.....consciousness were self, then consciousness would not lead to affliction, and one would obtain of consciousness, ‘Let my consciousness be thus, let my consciousness not be thus’.”<sup>2</sup> But the actual situation is the opposite. “As indeed, monks, matter.....feeling.....perception.....determinations.....consciousness is not-self, so consciousness leads to affliction; and, it is not obtained of consciousness, ‘Let my consciousness

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1. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 35.*

2. *Rūpañca.....vedanā ca.....saññā ca.....saṅkhārā ca.....viññānañca*  
*hidaṃ bhikkhave attā abhavissa nayidaṃ viññānaṃ ābādhāya samvattēyya,*  
*labbhettha ca viññāne, evaṃ me viññānaṃ hotu, evaṃ me viññānaṃ mā ahositī.*  
(*Mahāvagga I, Pancavaggiyakathā.*)



be thus, let my consciousness not be thus.’”<sup>1</sup> And this only means that what is taken as self is really not-self (*anattā*). The assumed mastery is a deception, a mockery.

Nevertheless, this notion of a self persists; and it persists because it is associated with the perceptions of pleasurableness and permanence. In fact these two perceptions are more explicitly associated with the notion of self than with the conceit ‘I’; and the reason for this is simply that self claims to be an **eternal self-same I**.

The most important significance of the five-holding-aggregates is the pressure for recognition as self. The *puthujjana* cannot withstand this pressure. So he regards the five-holding-aggregates, or a part thereof, in one way or another, as self. “Whatever recluses and divines there may be, monks, who in various ways regard self, they all regard the five-holding-aggregates or a certain one of them.”<sup>2</sup> Strictly speaking, the position is: the assemblage of the five-holding-aggregates has the tendency to regard itself (or a part of itself) as a self, and this assemblage, in the case of the uninstructed *puthujjana*, is incapable of voluntarily curbing the tendency; consequently it regards itself (or a part of itself) as self.

In this way, though anything that could rightly be said to be self is not to be found, a **false** self is **created** by the *puthujjana* when he reflects upon himself, and he refers to it as ‘my self’. So that, though actually and in truth self is not to be found there is ‘self’ (within inverted commas) to be found. By ‘self’ (within inverted commas) is **always** to be understood: ‘the thing taken as self’, or ‘the thing considered as self’, or ‘the thing regarded as self’.

This ‘self’ should not be confused with the self-identity of the thing that is taken as self, or with the self-identity of any

1. *Yasmā ca kho bhikkhave rūpaṃ . . . . vedanā . . . . saññā . . . . saṅkhārā . . . , viññāṇaṃ anattā, tasmā viññāṇaṃ ābādhāya samvattati, na ca labbhati viññāṇe. evaṃ me viññāṇaṃ hotu, evaṃ me viññāṇaṃ mā ahostīti.* (Mahāvagga 1, Pañcavaggiyakathā.)

2. *Ye hi keci bhikkhave samaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā anekavihiṭṭaṃ attānaṃ samanupassamānā samanupassanti, sabbe te pañcupādānakkhandhe samanupassanti etesaṃ vā aññataraṃ* (Saṃyuttanikāya III, Khandhasaṃyutta, Attadīpavagga, Sutta No. 5)



other thing for that matter. With the self-identity of a thing—i.e. with its endurance as the self-same thing—'self' has nothing whatsoever to do. 'Self' (*attā*) concerns the subject ('I'). 'Self' is 'I' itself or, it is 'the I that appears in reflexion'.

What appears to the *puthujjana* when he reflects upon himself is the five-holding-aggregates, which is the five-aggregates associated with the conceits 'I' and 'mine'. And he attempts to answer the question 'What am I?' (or, 'What is this that I am?') in the fashion: it is just this 'my self'; or, it is this selfsame subject ('I') that was, that is, and that will be, which I see.

'Self' indicates a more blown-up subjectivity than 'I' does, a more voluntary or deliberate subjectivity. For this reason 'self' is not referred to as a conceit (*māṇa*) as 'I' is; it is a notion. But because 'self' is spoken of as a notion it should not be assumed that it is just an abstract idea based upon some faulty reasoning. The *puthujjana* does not by any means experience his 'self' as an abstraction pure and simple; he is **affectively** and vigorously bound by it. And if reason does come in, it comes in only in the second place, so as to make whatever can be made of a *fiat accompli*.

Nor is 'self' an indefiniteness. It is a **deception**, and a deception (a mirage, for example) can be as definite as one pleases. The important thing is that it is **not** what one takes it for. When the sun shines upon sand there is the **appearance** of water. One can therefore be **deceived** into taking the phenomenon **as** water. The deception 'water' is there alright, though the phenomenon is **not**-water. The true position is that though the sun shining upon the sand appears as water, it is not-water.<sup>1</sup> So is it with 'self'. The deception 'self'

1. To the one who has never known water this appearance would not be the appearance of water; it would just be 'the appearance of the phenomenon of the sun shining upon the sand' or 'the appearance of an unknown phenomenon to be treated with care'. To such a one this statement regarding the 'true position' would be meaningless.

But, in view of this simile, it must not be assumed that something is (falsely) taken as self because one has had prior knowledge of experience of a self. That something is taken as self does not in any way mean that there has been prior knowledge or experience of a self. The simile should not be driven too far.



is there, though it is actually not self. In other words, 'self'—i.e. the thing (falsely) taken as self—is not-self (*anattā*). (This has nothing to do with mysticism. The statement that 'self' (within inverted commas) is not-self is not a mystic one. It would be mystic only if it says that self (without inverted commas) is not-self—like saying that A is not-A.)

Being that 'self' involves a higher or more complex degree of reflexion than 'I', the perceptions of permanence and pleasurable-ness are more explicitly associated with 'self'. It means that '(my) self' is more explicitly and more voluntarily considered to be permanent and pleasurable than what is taken as 'I'. We can therefore define '(my) self' as 'the pleasurable selfsame I', or as 'the pleasurable permanent I', or again as 'that pleasantly-eternal and irreplaceable subject that I am'. Thus, 'self' is a coarse layer that stands over the more subtle conceit 'I'.

'Self' is something necessarily ambiguous to the *puthujjana*. It makes him think that for him there is really and truly a self; but if ever he tries to make certain what precisely it is, he fails. The deer thinks there is water when the sun shines upon the sand and produces the mirage 'water' before his eyes; but whenever the deer runs after the 'water' it fails to find water. If the deer is told, "There is water," it will reply, "But I cannot find water however much I run after it." If on the other hand the deer is told, "There is no water", it will reply, "But I see water however much you say no." In the face of this very ambiguous situation it is unwise to give direct answers to the *puthujjana's* two primary questions concerning self: Is there self? Is there no self? If the *puthujjana* is told, "There is no self for you," he will say, "But I see (my) self however much you say no." On the other hand if he is told, "There is self for you," he will say, "But I cannot find precisely where or what it is."

As indicated in level (4) of the root-structure of the *puthujjana's* reflexive experience, the tendency to the conceit '(I) am' brings about an apparent separation of 'I' from the object; and the repeatedly reckoning of successive experiences as being for



'I'—level (5)—confirms to him in reflexion the view that there actually is an independent and permanent **I**—i.e. a (my) self—that stands separate from all experience. The persistence in time of a series of created 'I's' is conceived by him as the persistence in time of a separate selfsame **I**, a self. But what there **is** is 'self' (within inverted commas)—i.e. something wrongly considered to be actually self. 'Self' is therefore a sort of positive-negative; it is an ambiguity. It is **as if** something that in truth **is not**, somehow or other **is**. (Here again this does not fall under mysticism, for it does not state that what is-not is; it only states that it is **as if** what is not is, and so of course there is a problem). The notion of self together with its inseparable companions—the perceptions of permanency (or of being eternal) and pleasurableness—arises, and something or other is stamped 'self', but there is nothing that can be found to correspond to self; for, anything that corresponds to self, anything that can rightly be taken as self, must **necessarily** be permanent, be eternal. And there is nothing pertaining to the individual that can be rightly considered permanent or eternal. Self is positive to the extent that it **appears**, to the extent that something or other is regarded as self, but negative to the extent that there is **nothing** that can be taken as really self. **Always** what appears as self is not-self, simply because it is, among other things, not permanent. As it gazes at the sun shining upon the sand, the deer sees water; therefore the **appearance** of water is **definitely** there, but there is actually no water corresponding to the appearance. In the same way, to the *puthujjana*, when he practises reflexion, something or other appears to him as actually being self (which he refers to as 'my self'), but there is definitely nothing which can be rightly regarded as self. So that, to the *puthujjana* there is 'self' (within inverted commas), but no self (without inverted commas). (Our simile of the deer gazing at the sun shining upon the sand should not be driven too far, for the reason that though there **is** water to be found **elsewhere**, there is **no** self to be found **anywhere**.)



## "MY SELF"

In this way, any experience can be considered to have a positive aspect, which is the thing experienced, or the object—the 'world'—,and in a sense, a negative aspect, which is the apparent (selfsame) subject—'self'. So we have, "the self, the world" (*attā ca loko ca*)—one the inseparable correlative of the other—,and the two together forming the combination which can be referred to by the compound word 'myself', or rather by the phrase myself as determined by my whole situation. But as we pointed out, this selfsame subject is negative only in a particular sense; because it appears, to that extent it is positive; but because there is really nothing to correspond to it, it is negative. Thus the *puṭhujjana*—defining himself by the compound word 'myself'—finds himself to be as negative as he is positive, or *vice versa*: the existential ambiguity. And, as we mentioned in Chapter I, he experiences anxiety when confronted with the possibility that the positive foundation upon which his irreplaceable 'self' rests (or was resting) **will not be there**; in other words, when he does find that what he took to be actually self will not be there. This is the contradiction that constantly threatens him whenever he reflects upon himself—the agonizing possibility that he is void (*suñña*) of an actual self, and so, in the end, that 'my self' will **not be**.<sup>1</sup>

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1. The question of anxiety in the face of nothingness is to both Heidegger and Sartre merely the question of anxiety in the face of death. The nothingness that determines anxiety is **not merely** the assumed blankness or nothingness of death which is a somewhat imaginable radical change, but the possibility that I am **not a self**, that I do not exist. It is the possibility of 'personal' nothingness, of subjective nothingness that determines anxiety, and this is a matter that arises whenever the *puṭhujjana* reflects upon himself.



We said that what is taken as self is the five-holding-aggregates or a certain holding-aggregate. However, within the five-holding-aggregates, what the *puthujjana* is more seriously led into regarding as self is the consciousness of reflexion which springs up from the mind-base—in a looser sense, the regarding or the considering, or the knowing. This is because the nature of consciousness—particularly the consciousness springing up from the mind-base—is such that it lends itself to be 'self' very much more than the body does. The body is positive in essence; it has matter or substance. Consciousness is negative in essence, though it positively exists and is present in reflexion. Self, which is a positive-negative (an ambiguity), therefore appears to be very much nearer consciousness in nature than the body. And of the six kinds of consciousness, mind-consciousness lends itself to be regarded as self more readily than the other five because it cognizes the five percepts (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch) in the mode of the imagination as well as abstract ideas divorced from these five percepts altogether. That mind-consciousness lends itself to be regarded as self more readily than any other thing is in fact implied in the following statement of the Buddha.

"The uninstructed *puthujjana*, monks, can turn away, get dispassion for, be released from this body made up of the four primary modes of behaviour. What is the reason for that? In this body made up of the four primary modes of behaviour, monks, he sees a growth, a deterioration, a coming together, and a breaking up. Therefore the uninstructed *puthujjana* can turn away, get dispassion for, be released therefrom.

"But what, monks, is called thinking, is called mind, is called knowing,—to turn away from that, to get dispassion for that, to be released from that, the uninstructed *puthujjana* is not able. What is the reason for that? For a long time, monks, has it been for the uninstructed *puthujjana* to hang on, to cherish, to hold to (the view): 'This is mine; this am I; this is my self'. Therefore the uninstructed *puthujjana* cannot turn away from, get dispassion for, get released therefrom.



“But it were better, monks, if the uninstructed *puthujjana* were to come to regard this body made up of the four primary modes of behaviour as self rather than his thinking. What is the reason for that? It is seen, monks, that the body made up of the four primary modes of behaviour persists for one year, persists for two years, persists for three years, persists for four years, persists for five years, persists for ten years, persists for twenty years, persists for thirty years, persists for forty years, persists for fifty years, persists for a hundred years, persists for even longer. But what, monks, is called thinking, is called mind, is called knowing—that, night and day, arises as another and ceases as another.”<sup>1</sup>

What is said in the above statement is, briefly, that though the uninstructed *puthujjana* can get detached from the body—i.e. though he can stop considering the body to be ‘I’, ‘mine’ and ‘self’—he cannot detach himself from his reflexive consciousness. He cherishes the views ‘this is mine’, ‘this am I’ and ‘this is my self’, as indeed he must, tied up as they are with the perception of pleasurableness; and even if he give up taking the body as the ‘this’ in these views, he cannot give up taking reflexive consciousness to be the ‘this’. This taking, at the level of

1. *Assutavā bhikkhave putthujjano imasmim cātummahābhūtikasmim kāyasmim nibbindeyya’pi virajjeyya’pi vimucceyya’pi. Tam kissa hetu? Dissati bhikkhave imassa cātummahābhūtikassa kāyassa ācayo’pi apacayo’pi ādānampi nikkhepanampi. Tasmā tatrāssutavā putthujjano nibbindeyya’pi virajjeyya’pi vimucceyya’pi.*

*Tam ca kho etaṃ bhikkhave vuccati cittaṃ itipi mano’itipi viññāṇaṃ itipi, tatrāssutava putthujjano nālaṃ nibbinditum nālaṃ virajjitum nālaṃ vimuccitum. Tam kissa hetu? Dīgharattaṃ etaṃ bhikkhave assutavato putthujanassa ajjhositāṃ mamāyitaṃ parāmaññaṃ: etaṃ mama, eso ahaṃ asmi eso me attā ti. Tasmā tatrāssutava putthujjano nālaṃ nibbinditum nālaṃ virajjitum nālaṃ vimuccitum.*

*Varam bhikkhave assutavā putthujjano imaṃ cātummahābhūtikaṃ kāyaṃ attato upagaccheyya natheva cittaṃ. Tam kissa hetu? Dissatāyaṃ bhikkhave cātummahābhūtikaṃ kāyo ekampi vassaṃ tiṭṭhamāno dvepi vassāni tiṭṭhamāno tīnapi vassāni tiṭṭhamāno cattāripi vassāni tiṭṭhamāno pañcapi vassāni tiṭṭhamāno dasapi vassāni tiṭṭhamāno vīsatiapi vassāni tiṭṭhamāno tiṃsampi vassāni tiṭṭhamāno cattārisampi vassāni tiṭṭhamāno paññāsampi vassāni tiṭṭhamāno vassasatampi tiṭṭhamāno bhiyyo pi tiṭṭhamāno, Yañca kho etaṃ bhikkhave vuccati cittaṃ itipi mano itipi viññāṇaṃ itipi, tam rattiyaṃ ca divasassa ca aññadeva uppajjati aññaṃ nirujjhati, (Saṃyutta-nikāya II, Abhisamayasaṃyutta, Mahāvagga, Sutta No. 1.)*

In this Sutta passage *viññāṇa* is used in the sense of knowing, in which sense it is really referring to the consciousness of reflexion.



reflective philosophical thoughts becomes crystallized in the various theories of a self that populate the history of philosophy. Descartes, for example, though he begins in a spirit of uncompromising doubt eventually cannot avoid the postulation of a self, decked out though this may be as an incontrovertible conclusion founded upon apodictic reflexive evidence. In his *Meditations* he sets out to secure a ground for the superstructure of knowledge by doubting everything that can possibly be doubted. But, after everything has been scrutinized, suspended and reduced to the deception of a 'malicious demon', the one thing he finds he cannot doubt is the existence of the thinker himself: *Cogito ergo sum*—'I think, therefore I am'. And this thinker for Descartes is the ego or self. Sartre, in his essay entitled *The Transcendence of the Ego*, rejects the primacy of the Cartesian *cogito* by asserting that the consciousness which says "I am" is not actually the consciousness which thinks. In this way he makes the mystery more mysterious, but yet unable to escape from it, he elegantly falls between two stools. Husserl, despite the sophistication of his method, finally discovers a self at the summit of the hierarchy of consciousness which he couches in the phrase 'bare subjectivity of consciousness'. By an ingenious verbal device he attempts to combine an apprehended 'I' with a transcendental 'I' and a psychological 'I', and succeeds in falling, even more elegantly, between three stools<sup>1</sup>. Such conclusions these philosophers reach are inevitable, for the very search for certainty upon which they embark is itself motivated, at a deep level within the seeker's mind concealed even from himself, by the compulsion to secure the reality of his own existence as a self. Therefore, however thoroughgoing their investigations may be, the conclusion is already given at the outset of the inquiry. Being *puthujjanas* they must in reflexion identify something or other as self, as that which 'I' **am**. Since their philosophical awareness will not permit them to grant this status to the body or the coarser

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1. Husserl's *Logical Investigations* and his article on Phenomenology in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.



expressions of mentality, they inevitably arrive at reflexive consciousness as the only suitable candidate for the role.

But we can go a step further here. We can say that from amidst the many 'thinkings' or 'knowings' the **particular** 'thinking' or 'knowing' that is identified as 'self' is the thinking as 'I' and 'mine'. In other words, what is **primarily**, though very implicitly taken to be 'self' is the **fundamental holding** itself, which at the more explicit level is the desire-and-lust (*chandarāga*). The root-structure of the *puthujjana*'s experience points to this situation, for the basic and common thinking, or the conceiving, or the reflexive consciousness present therein, is that pointing to 'I' and 'mine'. But when there is holding, something is held, and that would be the five aggregates. In this way the five aggregates get involved in the second place.

The untenable position taken up by the *puthujjana* with regard to the question of '(my) self' can, if necessary, be expressed differently *via* the law of contradiction in the following manner.

In reflexion the *puthujjana* examines and describes to himself his own thinking, refusing to tolerate any non-identities, contradictions and excluded middles—in other words, refusing to break the laws of thought. Now, at a certain point in his thinking, he comes face to face with a contradiction that he cannot resolve. And the appearance of this contradiction whenever he engages in an act of reflexion seems to be **inherent** in the very act of reflecting or thinking. This contradiction, as we pointed out in our very first Chapter, is the existence of the thinker himself **as a subject**—'I' or '(my) self'. In the *Dīghanikāya*, *Sutta No. 15*, it is concisely presented in the following manner. The Buddha tells Ānanda that if a man were to identify his 'self' with feeling, he should be asked **which** kind of feeling—i.e. pleasant, unpleasant or neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant—he identifies as his 'self'. The man cannot identify his 'self' with all three kinds of feeling at the **same** time, simply because only one of the three kinds is present at any given time. Thus if he makes the identification that feeling is his 'self', he must do it with three **different** kinds of feeling



in **succession**. But of course, his 'self', he takes for granted as being self-identical—A is A—; that is to say, as being identically the **same** 'self' on each occasion. Now he proceeds to identify this his 'self' in turn with the three different feelings B, C & D. A is therefore both B and C (not to mention D). But C is different to B; and that merely means C is not-B. So he comes up against the position that A is both B and not-B; and that is a contradiction. Unfortunately, whether it is feeling or something else the *puthujjana* is identifying his 'self' with, on each and every occasion, he is identifying it with something **different**. The contradiction persists whatever he does.

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In the *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 2*, the following passage concerning the uninstructed *puthujjana* occurs:

"He improperly attends thus: Was I in the past period? Was I not in the past period? What was I in the past period? How was I in the past period? Having been what, what did I come to be in the past period? Will I be in the future period? Will I not be in the future period? What will I be in the future period? How will I be in the future period? Having been what, what will I be in the future period? Or, he is a self-questioner about the present (thus): Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? This creature-whence has it come? Whither is it bound?

"To him thus improperly attending, one of six views arises: The view arises that 'there is self for me' is real and true for him: the view arises that 'there is no self for me' is real and true for him: the view arises that 'with self I perceive self' is real and true for him; the view arises that 'with self I perceive not-self' is real and true for him; the view arises that 'with not-self I perceive self' is real and true for him. Or, there occurs to him the following view: "Whatever is this self for me that speaks and feels, that experiences now here, now there, the



result of good and evil deeds it is this self for me that is permanent, stable, eternal, of a nature not to change, will stand firm like unto the eternal.”<sup>1</sup>

This passage indicates that when the *puthujjana* practises reflexion he sees ‘self’ and that he may identify ‘self’ with both reflexive and immediate experience, or he may identify ‘self’ with reflexive experience alone, or he may identify ‘self’ with immediate experience alone, but he cannot **stop** identifying ‘self’ with either. In the view ‘with self I perceive self’ he is identifying ‘self’ with both reflexive and immediate experience; in the view ‘with self I perceive not-self’ he is identifying ‘self’ with only reflexive experience; and in the view ‘with not-self I perceive self’ he is identifying ‘self’ with only immediate experience.<sup>2</sup> If he stops identifying ‘self’ with either reflexive experience or immediate experience, he would come to the view ‘with not-self I perceive not-self’; and this he cannot do because he has **no** perception of not-self, no *anattasaññā*. Even his conceptual negation ‘there is no self for me’ is based upon the tacit assumption of a self, which in the face of the existential ambiguity, he **rationally** or objectively finds it necessary to

1. *So evaṃ ayoniso manasikaroti: ahoṣiṃ nu kho ahaṃ atītamaddhānaṃ, na nu kho ahoṣiṃ atītamaddhānaṃ, kinnu kho ahoṣiṃ atītamaddhānaṃ, kathannu kho ahoṣiṃ atītamaddhānaṃ, kiṃ hutvā kiṃ ahoṣiṃ nu kho ahaṃ atītamaddhānaṃ, bhavissāmi nu kho ahaṃ anāgatamaddhānaṃ, na nu kho bhavissāmi anāgatamaddhānaṃ, kinnu kho bhavissāmi anāgatamaddhānaṃ, kathannu kho bhavissāmi anāgatamaddhānaṃ, kiṃ hutvā kiṃ bhavissāmi nu kho ahaṃ anāgatamaddhānanti etarahi vā paccuppannaṃ addhānaṃ ajjhattaṃ kathaṃkathī hoti: ahaṃ nu khosmi, noṃ nu khosmi kinnu khosmi, kathannu khosmi, ayaṃ nu kho satto kuto āgato, so kuhiṃ gāmi bhavissatīti.*

*Tassa evaṃ ayoniso manasikaroto channaṃ diṭṭhīnaṃ aññatarā diṭṭhi uppajjati: atthi me attāti vāssa saccato thetato diṭṭhi uppajjati, natthi me attāti vāssasaccato thetato diṭṭhi uppajjati, attanāva attānaṃ sañjānāmīti vāssa saccato thetato diṭṭhi uppajjati, attanāva anattānaṃ sañjānāmīti vāssa saccato thetato diṭṭhi uppajjati, anattanāva attānaṃ sañjānāmīti vāssa saccato thetato diṭṭhi uppajjati; atha vā paṇassa evaṃ diṭṭhi hoti: Yo me ayaṃ attā vado vedeyyo tatra tatra kalyāṇapāpakānaṃ kammānaṃ vipākānaṃ paṭisaṃvedeti, so kho paṇa me ayaṃ attā nicco dhuvo sassato avipariṇāmadhammo sassatisamaṃ tatheva ṭhassatīti.*

2. Husserl (vide his article on phenomenology in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*) seems to be aware that none of these three views are adequate. But he is unable to escape from them.



negate. For him, 'self' is not what it really is: 'self'. For him, 'self' is, in a **subtle** way, actually self. And taking 'self' to be actually self, he denies self; thus the **necessity** to negate self—a necessity born of the **tacit assumption** of self. In this way the rationalist or materialist, aware or unaware, posits self **subjectively**—as indeed he must do, being a *puthujjana*—, and then negates it **objectively**. That is precisely why, in spite of all his negations, his intentions are 'self'-ish. This view of the *puthujjana* that 'there is no self for me' should not therefore be mistaken for the right view of the noble disciple, who, **having** the perception of not-self due to his understanding the Buddha's Teaching, **sees** that neither a self nor anything pertaining to a self is to be found: "Since either self or what pertains to self, monks, is not to be found . . . ." <sup>1</sup>; or, "Void is this of self or of what pertains to self." <sup>2</sup> Here, the noble disciple sees 'self' as what it really is—'self'—, whilst the *puthujjana* does **not**. The *puthujjana* cannot conceive experience as something that does not concern a permanent and pleasurable subject—a self. Therefore, **he is in no position to say what the noble disciple says.** <sup>3</sup> The noble disciple, as we shall see later on, has the perception of not-self, and so he sees that 'self' is 'self', and consequently, that 'self' is not-self; but the *puthujjana* not having the perception of not-self does not see these things. For these reasons, the *puthujjana's* rational or objective view that 'there is no self for me' is a view that **misleads** him. Though it is true that no self is to be found, the *puthujjana* still takes something or other as self, and therefore there is 'self' for him; and, ignorant as he is of the true state

1. *Attani ca bhikkhave attaniye ca saccato thetato anupalabbhamāne . . . .* (*Majjhima-nikāya Sutta No. 22*)

2. *Suññaṃ idaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā.* (*Samyuttanikāya IV, Cittasamyutta, Sutta No. 7.*)

3. In Chapter II we said that the individual who does not understand the Buddha's Teaching can get certain things the wrong way round. The statement that "since either self or what pertains to self, monks, is not to be found . . . ." and the Buddha's silence when Vacchagotta asked him whether there is no self, are two such important things.



of affairs, the negation 'there is no self for me' misleads him into thinking that he is devoid of both self **and** 'self'. The view that 'there is no self for me' thus takes the *puthujjana* away from seeing the true state of affairs concerning himself, which is that though there is no self there yet is 'self'. It is precisely in his attention being taken away from the fact that **for him** there **is** 'self' that the danger lies for him in this view. Into this danger Hume, for example, very cleverly succeeds in falling, when in his essay titled *Of Personal Identity*<sup>1</sup>, while attempting to negate the existence of a self, he says: "Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other, and never all exist at the same time. It cannot therefore be from any of these impressions, or from any other, that the idea of self is derived; and consequently there is no such idea." There is indeed no doubt whatsoever that Hume does not know the source of the idea of self; but for that reason, to say there is no such idea or to dismiss it saying that it is a false idea is only to close the stable door after the horse has escaped.

We can now understand why the Buddha remained silent when the *puthujjana* Vacchagotta asked the Buddha for direct answers—either in the affirmative or in the negative—to the two primary questions regarding self: 'Is there self?' 'Is there no self?' Vacchagotta was following a different teaching at the time. If the Buddha told him there was no self for him he would have been misled and even more confused than he already was. If on the other hand the Buddha had told him that there was a self for him, then the Buddha would not have been speaking in accordance with the true nature of Vacchagotta's experience, viz., not-self-ness (*anattatā*). It is not direct answers—whether in the affirmative or in the negative—that the *puthujjana* who asks such questions needs; it is proper instruction. But for this he must be willing to be instructed, he must be ready to learn.<sup>2</sup>

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1. *A Treatise of Human Nature, Volume I, Book I, Part IV.*

2. See footnote on page 15 for these questions of Vacchagotta and the Buddha's silence thereto.



The view that 'there is self for me' and its opposite view that 'there is no self for me' are the two boundary positions or extremities within which the *puthujjana*, not seeing things as they really are, fluctuates in the face of the existential ambiguity—an ambiguity from which he sees no way out. He can do no more than swing from one extreme to the other, from 'there is self' to 'there is no self', and *vice versa*; and the unfortunate thing is that **he cannot help but keep swinging**. Witness Blackham's statement: "Existential philosophies insist that any plain and positive answer is false, because the truth is in the insurmountable ambiguity which is at the heart of man and of the world." This ambiguity—'my self'—is insurmountable to the *puthujjana* by unaided reflexion, try as he may. All this further indicates that the problem of 'self' is of considerably greater difficulty than it is generally supposed to be, or is made to appear through the facile and ready-to-hand interpretation of the Buddha's doctrine of impermanence (*aniccatā*) to mean 'continuous change' or 'flux'.

Incidentally, it has become the fashion among modern writers, more so among those with great reverence for the *Abhidhamma piṭaka*, to interpret the doctrine of *anattā* as a flat negation of self. They hold that this doctrine simply means: even if the five aggregates are broken up into infinitesimal bits and pieces no self would be found in any of them anywhere. For these writers the doctrine of *anattā* just "proceeds analytically, by splitting existence up into the ultimate constituent parts, into mere empty, unsubstantial phenomena or elements." Such writers should take serious note of that section of the *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 2*, wherein the Buddha states that the *puthujjana* **improperly** attending to things can come to the conclusion 'there is no self for me'. This they should do, if for no other reason than to realize at least that the doctrine of *anattā* is not as simple as they imagine it to be. If it is really that simple a Buddha is not necessary, a Hume would do.

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Now, the *puthujjana*, implicitly or explicitly, holds to **belief** in self. In Pali, this holding to belief in self is termed *attavādupādāna*. (*Atta-vāda-upādāna* = holding to (*upādāna*) belief (*vāda*) in self (*attā*). He cannot hold to a self because there is no self to be found; he can hold only to a belief in self. And what is this belief he holds to? It is the belief that what **appears** as self is **actually** self, in other words, that ‘self’ is actually self; and the holding to belief in self is simply the attachment to the belief, or the consideration that the belief is ‘for me’. (Since it is ‘self’ that the *puthujjana* believes to be actually self, we can refer to *attavādupādāna* as holding to belief in self or as holding to belief in ‘self’). This is the fundamental belief that stands at the root of all **views** concerning self, such as ‘there is for me self’, ‘there is no self for me’, etc. These views concerning self are referred to in the Suttas as *attānuditṭhi*, whilst belief in self is referred to as *attavāda*. And the view ‘**this** is my self’ (*eso me attā*) is the rationalization of this belief the *puthujjana* is attached to. The relationship that the view ‘this is my self’ bears to belief in self is the same as that which the view ‘this am I’ bears to the conceit ‘(I) am’. When there is belief in self the entire edifice indicated in the root-structure of the *puthujjana*’s reflexive experience lies beneath it. Thus, belief in self requires the conceit ‘(I) am’ (and the rest), though, as we shall see later on, there can be the conceit ‘(I) am’ **without** belief in self. Belief in self is a coarse and deliberate reflexive layer that stands over the more subtle conceit ‘(I) am’. And in this context, it should be noted that belief refers to belief under **deliberate** reflexion. (We shall be discussing this further in Ch. ). Further, it should be noted that belief in self **involves** belief in ‘I’ and ‘mine’ too.

The consideration of a thing as self is also a holding (*upādāna*). ‘Self’ indicates something held; and the rationalization (or the conceptual elaboration) ‘this is my self’ is a degree of holding that is greater than what is indicated in the other two—‘this is mine’ and ‘this am I’. The consideration of a thing as ‘eternal pleasurable I’ is a harder and more deliberate holding than the consideration of a thing as merely ‘I’ wherein the



perceptions of permanence and pleasurable-ness are relatively implicit. Thus we get the triad 'This is mine; this am I; this is my self' (*etam mama, eso aham asmi, eso me attā*) which indicates three degrees of holding. 'This is mine' is the rationalization of the situation described in the root-structure, i.e. of the *maññanā* (conceiving); 'this am I' (*eso aham asmi*) is the rationalization of the conceit '(I) am' (*asmimāna*); and 'this is my self' is the rationalization of the belief in self (*attavāda*).

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The above now leads us to two very important phenomena referred to in the Suttas as *sakkāya* and *sakkāyadit̐thi*. It is important that one's thoughts are very clear here; and for the purpose of indicating what is meant by them we shall use the simile of the chariot (*ratha*) given in the Suttas.

There is a pile of parts (wheels, lynch-pins, floorboards, etc.) and these parts are assembled **in a certain fashion**. This assemblage when perceived presses for recognition by me as 'something I can travel in'. Accordingly, viewing the assemblage as something I can travel in, I give it the designation 'chariot'. If the question of travelling in it does not come in at all in anyway whatsoever, I would not call it 'chariot'; it would perhaps then be called 'a pile of parts'. But so long as the pile of parts assembled in the particular fashion signifies or points to being 'something I can travel in' there is a chariot. For there to be a chariot the parts must be assembled in the particular fashion **and** the assemblage when perceived must signify travelling. If anyone of these two conditions are not present, there is no chariot. In the same way, there are five-holding-aggregates, and these are assembled in a certain fashion. (An assemblage of the five-holding-aggregates in any other fashion than what it is, is an inconceivability. Incidentally, the assemblage of the five-holding-aggregates is just the five-



holding-aggregates). This assemblage presses for recognition as self, and accordingly it is **viewed** as self. And when this assemblage of five-holding-aggregates—i.e. the five-holding-aggregates, or the *pañcupādānakkhandhā*—is viewed as self, it is given the designation ‘person’ or ‘somebody’. Abstractly, it can be referred to as ‘personality’. The Pali word is *sakkāya*. Thus, ‘person’ or ‘personality’ (*sakkāya*) means: the five-holding-aggregates viewed as self.

A simple example in experience indicating the basic meaning of being a ‘person’—i.e. of the individual being **essentially** the **same subject**—would be as follows:

A and B are two *puthujjanas*. A harmed B sometime back. At that time B was in no position to retaliate. B meets A today under circumstances wherein B can retaliate. B now thinks (as he always does) that he **is** essentially the same subject who **was** in the past. So he **now** retaliates and takes revenge on A. A on the other hand thinks that B has taken revenge on him who **now** is essentially the same subject who **was** in the past. As against this state of affairs, if B does **not** consider himself to be **now** essentially the same subject who **was** in the past, thoughts of retaliation would immediately subside.

Now, for ‘person’ (or ‘personality’) to be there it is not necessary that the **entire** assemblage of the five-holding-aggregates must be viewed as self. Even if one of the five-holding-aggregates is viewed as self there is a ‘person’. This situation holds good simply because any one of the five-holding-aggregates is inseparably bound to the others; and viewing one particular holding-aggregate as self is, in its resultant effect, the same as viewing the entire assemblage. In fact, the *puthujjana*, reflecting upon himself, more often than not views only some part of the five-holding-aggregates as self. For example, Descartes views only his thinking. He does not of course provide us with a precise aggregate-wise definition of the phenomenon he refers to as ‘I think’ (*cogito*). But it is clear that he does not include the aggregate of matter in it. Most likely, he includes all the other four aggregates—feeling,



perception, determinations and consciousness—to some extent or other.

But there are other ways too by which there is the 'person'. What has been described above is only by way of considering the five-holding-aggregates or a part of them **as** self (*attato*). There can be the consideration of the five-holding-aggregates (or a part) as being **in** self; or there can be the consideration of self as being **in** the five-holding-aggregates (or in a part); or again, there can be the consideration of self as **having** (or being possessed of) the five-holding-aggregates (or a part). It does not matter in what **way** 'self' is identified with experience. So long as there is an identification in some way or other, there is a 'person' (or a 'personality').

This brings us on to the other phenomenon termed *sakkāya-dit̥thi*. *Sakkāyadit̥thi* is a compound word made up of the two words *sakkāya* (meaning 'person') and *dit̥thi* (meaning 'view'). Therefore we can render *sakkāyadit̥thi* as 'person'-view or as 'personality'-view. Quite naturally, there are precisely as many kinds of 'person'-view as there are ways of being a 'person'.

"How, noble lady, is there 'person'-view?"

Here, friend Visākha, the uninstructed *puthujjana*, unseeing of the noble ones, ignorant of the noble Teaching, undisciplined in the noble Teaching, unseeing of the good men, ignorant of the good men's Teaching, undisciplined in the good men's Teaching, regards matter . . . . feeling . . . . perception . . . . determination . . . . consciousness as self, or regards self as having consciousness, or regards consciousness as being in self, or regards self as being in consciousness. Thus, friend Visākha, is there 'person-view.'<sup>1</sup>

1. *Kataṃ paṇ'ayye sakkāyadit̥thi hoti?*

*Idha āvuso Visākha assuttavā puthujjano ariyānaṃ adassāvī ariyadhammassa akovido ariyadhamme avinīto sappurisaṇaṃ adassāvī sappurisaḍḍhammassa akovido sappurisaḍḍhamme avinīto rūpaṃ . . . . vedanaṃ . . . . saññāṃ . . . . saṅkhāre . . . . viññānaṃ attato samanupassati, viññānavantaṃ vā attānaṃ, attani vā viññānaṃ, viññāṇasmiṃ vā attānaṃ. Evaṃ kho āvuso Visākha sakkāyadit̥thi hotīti. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 44)*



This Sutta passage indicates that there can be twenty kinds (five times four) of 'person'-view, and that too by considering an aggregate as a whole always. But though the Sutta does not specifically say so, it is obvious that even if the individual regards just a part of one aggregate—as for example mind-consciousness only—as self, or as belonging to self, or as containing self, or as contained in self, and does not so regard any other aggregate or part of any other aggregate, he still has 'person'-view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*), he still remains a 'person' (*sakkāya*).

All this indicates a very important thing: that is, the experience of the *puthujjana* is a 'personal' experience. It is the experience of a 'person', of one who identifies oneself, in one way or another, with 'self'. The *puthujjana* may think that he is being 'impersonal', but he is certainly not so in fact. His experience is 'personal' **to some degree or other**, simply because **all** reflexive experience of his is involved with 'self' in one way or another, explicitly or implicitly.

It is a fatal mistake to reckon *sakkāyadiṭṭhi* ('person'-view) as "the belief in a self or soul" or purely and simply as "the view that **in** the five-holding-aggregates there is a self". These facile interpretations are rather common, and therefore should be guarded against.

It is also important not to mix up the belief in self with the regarding (things) as self in some way or other. The former concerns holding to belief in self (*attavādupādāna*), and the latter concerns 'person'-view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*). The distinction is important because this 'person'-view is **dependent upon** the holding to belief in self, *sakkāyadiṭṭhi* is dependent upon *attavādupādāna*. If there is no holding to belief in self whatsoever, then the question of regarding anything as self in any way or other cannot arise. All those mystifications like "pure consciousness", "essential self", "Self" (with a capital s), etc. which are said to be beyond the five aggregates are determined by this holding to belief in self; they are the outcome of *attavādupādāna*.



If there is 'person' there **must** be 'person'-view as a necessary part of the structure of 'person'. (If there is 'chariot' there must be the view that the assemblage of parts is something to travel in, and this view can be called 'chariot'-view, since the assemblage of parts as something to travel in is 'chariot'). In Pali terms, if there is *sakkāya* there must be *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*, at least in latent form, as a necessary part of the structure of *sakkāya*. In fact the Buddha refers to the five-holding-aggregates as the 'person', and the five-holding-aggregates are what is considered, in one way or another, as self. In Pali terms, the *sakkāya* is the *pañcupādānakkhandhā*. "And what, monks, is the 'person'? The five-holding-aggregates are to be so called."<sup>1</sup> (It is the assemblage of parts that is regarded as something to travel in). Further, since it is in the nature of the five-holding-aggregates to press for recognition as self, they are pregnant with being regarded as self if they have not already been so regarded. It also follows that though we refer to the five-holding-aggregates as the five-aggregates considered as 'I' and 'mine' only, it is equally correct for us to refer to the five-holding-aggregates as the five-aggregates considered as 'I', 'mine' and 'self'.

It is very important, however, to note that it is **only if** the conceivings indicated in the root-structure—i.e. the *maññanā* of the *Mūlapariyāya*—are present that considerations of self can be present. If the considerations of self are manifest then the entire edifice indicated in the root-structure lies beneath; and even if considerations of self are not manifest, this edifice is still pregnant with considerations of self. In the case of the *puthujjana*, he has no option but to let these considerations become manifest, and quite naturally he lets it happen. He cannot curb them, cannot tone them down.

1. *Katamo ca bhikkhave sakkāyo? Pañcupādānakkhandhā tissa vacanīyaṃ* (*Samyutta-nikāya III, Khandhasamyutta, Antavagga, Sutta No. 3.*)



## CHAPTER VIII

### CRAVING (*TANHĀ*)

As we pointed out in the last Chapter the five-holding-aggregates constantly press for recognition as self. And the *puthujjana* not being able to withstand the pressure takes the five-holding-aggregates (or a part thereof), in one way or another, as self. His 'being', which at the very root is a being-'I', is therefore also a being-'self'; or it is a 'self'-existence. In Pali, it is termed *bhava*.

Being-'self' means being-something-that-is-taken-as-self; and what is taken as self is the five-holding-aggregates (or a part thereof). Now the five-holding-aggregates (or a part thereof) taken as self is also the 'person' (*sakkāya*). Therefore, 'being' (*bhava*) ultimately means being-a-'person'; or, it means the existence-of-the-'person'.

What now **maintains** the 'personality'; or, what maintains 'being'?

The answer is: holding (*upādāna*).

Basically, holding is mentally **endowing** the immediate experience **as** 'I' when the conceit 'I' is conceived in the awareness of the immediate experience; and this holding **determines** or points to an 'I' that is not a mere concept (conceit) but a concept with a definite referent; and the repeatedly determining of this situation with every different experience points to an 'I' that stands separate from every individual experience. It points to the **existence** of such an 'I'. In other words, taking experience **as** 'I' determines **being-'I'**, determines 'I-am'. "By holding matter is there '(I) am', not by not-holding. By holding feeling . . . . perception . . . . determinations . . . . consciousness is there '(I) am', not by not-holding."<sup>1</sup> Therefore the Buddha teaches

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1. *Rupam upādāya asmī hoti no anupādāya. Vedanaṃ . . . . Saññaṃ . . . . Sankhāre . . . . Viññāṇam upādāya asmīti hoti no anupādāya.* (*Samyuttanikāya III Khandhasamyutta, Theravagga, Sutta No. 1*)



that 'being' (*bhava*) is dependent upon holding (*upādāna*): "With holding as condition, 'being' "—(*upādānapaccayā bhava*).<sup>1</sup>

The existentialist is not wrong when he says: "When I no longer have anything I shall no longer be anything."<sup>2</sup> But he is wrong when he says: "Being is not reduced to having, but having is transformed into being."<sup>3</sup> Though, in the latter case, he gives precedence to 'having', he is wrong in thinking that 'having' is **transformed** into 'being', 'Having' (which is really considering as 'I' and 'mine') must be there for 'being' to be there.

Something **has** to be reckoned or stamped **as** 'I' if 'I' is to **be**. In a situation where an eternal selfsame I actually exists no such reckoning is **necessary**. It is only because no such I is available that the taking of this and that as an 'I' is necessary. So that, in the absence of an eternal selfsame I, the *puthujjana* creates an 'I', and in reflexion falsely assumes that this creation of his is actually an eternal selfsame I—i.e. a self. He thus thinks that he actually exists as a self.

On what now does this reckoning to be 'I' and 'self'—i.e. this holding (*upādāna*)—depend? It depends fundamentally on the **craving**-to-be-'I'. This craving-to-be-'I', in whatever form being-'I' is envisaged, has the character of an appetite, a hunger; and it is insatiable, because it is a wanting **more**. The *puthujjana* incessantly experiences a dire need to **continue** as 'I', to **persist** as 'I', to **be** 'I'. He **craves**-to-be-'I'. This craving-to-be-'I' is, in the very first place, not a craving for eternal existence wherein eternity is conceived as the infinity of duration. Just as the question of being for all time, i.e. of being eternal, is consequential to that of merely continuing to be, craving for eternal being is also consequential to this craving-to-be-'I'. Craving-to-be-'I' is always pregnant with craving for eternal being. But craving for eternal being (or for immortality) is not always manifest. When manifest, it

1. *Samyuttanikāya II, Abhisamayasaṃyutta, Buddhavagga, Sutta No. 2.*

2. *Six Existentialist Thinkers*, p. 80.

3. *Ibid*, p. 71.



stands as a coarse layer over the craving-to-be-‘I’ which is always present in the root structure of the *puthujjana*’s experience—like the scum that stands formed over the surface of the boiling soup.

The Buddha teaches that apart from craving-for-‘being’ there is also the craving for what, **on the surface**, is the opposite of ‘being’. This is referred to as *vibhavatanhā*, which can be translated as craving-for-‘unbeing’.

It is the Pali word *vibhava* that has been rendered by us as ‘unbeing’ (within inverted commas). However, it is not a word that lends itself kindly to translation, and ready-to-hand translations of it as non-existence, non-being, self-annihilation etc. tend to miss the point. Therefore it is all the more important that we get at its meaning very correctly.

The *puthujjana* first takes what is not-self to be self. Thus his existence is really a ‘self’-existence, a ‘being’ (*bhava*), though **he** thinks it is the existence of a self, is a being self. Then he finds that this ‘being’ is not satisfactory. But since this ‘being’, which **for him** is actually a being self, is unsatisfactory, he thinks that being self is unsatisfactory. So he looks for what **he thinks**,—repeat, **he thinks**—is unbeing self. In other words, he looks for the cutting-off of a not-self **assuming that it is really the cutting-off of a self**. In this way he looks for a **false** unbeing, a **false** cutting-off. He looks for ‘unbeing’ (*vibhava*).

The trouble is that the *puthujjana* looks for unbeing self having taken what is **not** being self to be actually being self. Thus every attempt towards ‘unbeing’ (*vibhava*) directly involves the confirmation or assertion of ‘being’ (*bhava*). In other words, every attempt to do away with the existence of a falsely assumed self carries with it the false assumption of the existence of a self; so that the fatal error of assuming that his existence is the existence of a self is thereby perpetrated. Trying to get away from ‘being’ through ‘unbeing’ is only remaining tied to ‘being’ further—like the dog that is tied to the post with a leash, in attempting to release itself from the post, only keeps



running round and round the post. "Those worthy recluses and divines who make known the cutting off, the perishing, the 'unbeing' of the existing creature—they, through fear of the 'person', through loathing the 'person', are simply running and circling round the 'person'. Just, as a dog tied with a leash to a firm post or stake runs and circles round the post or stake, so these recluses and divines through fear of the 'person', through loathing the 'person', are simply running and circling round the 'person'."<sup>1</sup> The post is 'self'-existence, or 'being' (*bhava*); the leash is the **not knowing** or **not understanding** what 'being' really is; and the running round and round the post is the attempt at 'unbeing'. Running round the post only keeps the dog attached to the post; similarly, attempting 'unbeing' only maintains 'being'.

If the *puthujjana* wants to do away with 'being' entirely he must stop **creating** 'being'. That means he must stop creating 'self'. And for this he must first understand that he is taking what is really not-self to be self. As against this, 'unbeing' only involves him in re-creating 'being', and therefore provides him with no escape from 'being'. "Whatsoever recluses or divines think that through 'unbeing' there is an escape from 'being', all such have not escaped from 'being', I declare."<sup>2</sup>

All this should indicate that *vibhava* is not non-'being' or absence of 'being'. The latter is referred to in the Suttas as *abhava*. Thus the Sutta usage of *vibhava* and not *abhava* does not indicate a careless choice of words or a quirk of language, but a careful distinction made on ontological grounds.

Now, my present mode of 'being' **as a totality** (which would be 'myself as determined by my whole situation') is the most satisfactory choice from among those that were available to me for actualization at the time of choosing. No doubt, we sometimes refrain from choosing the experience which we consider

1. *Majjhima Nikāya*, 102. (p. 232—233), Vol. II.

2. *Ye va pana keci samana vā brāhmaṇa vā vibhavaṇa bhavassa nissaranamanohamsu sabbe te anissatā bhavasmatī vadāmi.* (*Udāna*, *Nandavagga*, *Sutta No. 10*).



would bring us the greatest possible **immediate** satisfaction; but we are then experiencing a reflexive satisfaction by anticipating a future greater satisfaction or advantage to be derived by foregoing the immediate one; and this anticipation and reflexive satisfaction is part of our present total experience. Of all the modes of 'being' possible at the time, I chose to be this mode because it appeared the most satisfactory; and, right now, it is what I crave most for within the ambit of realizable possibility. So this present mode of 'being' has present craving-for-'being' as condition. Now, if I crave **only** for **this** mode of 'being' there can never, on my own responsibility, be any 'being' other than this present 'being.' I can of course have some 'being' **forced** upon me by conditions beyond my control. But that would not be **my** responsibility. Further, for me to crave only for this present mode of 'being' it must be **wholly satisfactory**. But this present 'being' may not appear wholly satisfactory when placed against the many modes of 'being' it now points to; and these many modes of 'being' pointed to are the **intentions** (or better, determinations) which form an **integral part** of this present 'being'. That means there is an **inherent unsatisfactoriness** in my present 'being' (which was thought to be most satisfactory at time of choice). It is not **all possible** satisfaction. It is always lacking (*ūno*)<sup>1</sup> and unsatisfied (*atitto*).<sup>2</sup> At every instant of my 'being' I apprehend a certain (however minor) contingency or unjustifiability in the (earlier) choice which determined the mode of 'being'. I am therefore always on the verge of considering my present 'being' (which was determined by that choice) in an objective fashion, and consequently of surpassing it and making it a thing of the past by now determining a new mode of 'being'. So I crave for the un-doing of this present 'being'. This is *vibhavatanhā*. And by that means I expect the anticipated 'being' to give me the highest possible satisfaction that can be intended right now. When this new 'being' is made present, again the same situation holds.

1. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 82.*

2. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 82.*



In this way, we find that in the structure of our experience both craving-for-'being' and craving-for-'unbeing' are present, though one may be more **manifest** than the other depending upon the **nature** of the 'being'. More particularly; when there is felt pleasure, craving-for-'being' is manifest, and so there is a wish to continue in that state of 'being'; and when there is felt unpleasure, craving-for-'unbeing' is manifest, and so there is a wish to pass away from that state of 'being' into another.

It is necessary to realize that craving-for-'unbeing' **has** to be there if there is craving-for-'being'. The *puthujjana*'s existence is a being 'self' and **not** a being self. It is only because his existence is the existence of a **false** self, i.e. of a 'self', that the **necessity** for 'unbeing' presents itself to some degree or other always. A deception must always lead to betrayal in some way or other, sooner or later. It is not the seeing that craving-for-'unbeing' is there in experience that is difficult to achieve, it is the seeing that craving-for-'unbeing' **has** to be there as a **necessary part of the structure of experience**. Thus, it is not the fact itself that is difficult to see, it is the **necessity** for the fact.<sup>1</sup>

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1. The existentialist says: "Fundamentally man is the desire to be, and the existence of this desire is not to be established by an empirical induction; it is the result of an *a priori* description of the being for-itself, since desire is a lack and since the for-itself is the being which is to itself its own lack of being."

This is a very interesting statement. By 'desire to be' he is referring essentially to *bhavatanhā*. Now, he cannot hope to solve this dilemma. For it can be solved only by seeing that the being of the for-itself is **no more** lack of being: in other words, by seeing that there is no more desire to be. And this he cannot do, for the simple reason that, by assumption, the being of the for-itself **is** the lack of being, **is** the desire to be.

It is also a good example of how the existential ambiguity becomes insurmountable to the existentialist. The existentialist does not of course know that he has put himself into this situation (a situation from which he cannot extricate himself) by his tacit assumption of self—an assumption that, as a *puthujjana*, he cannot help but make.

We can summarize this plight of the existentialist in the following way; knowingly or unknowingly he takes something or other as self in one way or another, and then finds that he cannot justify his action; but he sees no way out, and yet he cannot help but hold to belief in self (*attavādupādāna*).



Now, just as much as 'person' (*sakkāya*) contains 'person'-view (*sakkāyaditthi*), 'being' (*bhava*) contains 'being'-view (*bhavaditthi*) and 'unbeing'-view (*vibhavaditthi*). Quite simply, 'being'-view is the view that this living is a being self, and 'unbeing'-view is the view that there is the doing away of this living which is a being self. Both views are wrong, simply because they both assume self. Further, just as much as 'unbeing' (*vibhava*) embodies 'being' (*bhava*), 'unbeing'-view (*vibhavaditthi*) embodies 'being'-view (*bhavaditthi*).

At the **surface** level 'being'-view (*bhavaditthi*) is in opposition to 'unbeing'-view (*vibhavaditthi*), just as much as, at the surface level, 'being' (*bhava*) is in opposition to 'unbeing' (*vibhava*). But, inasmuch as they both spring from the same source—'self'—, at bottom, they **promote** each other. This they do in an indirect way, i.e. by directly promoting 'self' in **outwardly** opposing directions. So that, even though at the surface level 'being'-view and 'unbeing'-view are in opposition to each other, when it comes to **destruction** of 'self' and those things dependent upon 'self', each helps the other to **prevent** that destruction. "Monks, there are these two views; 'being'-view and 'unbeing'-view. Whosoever recluses and divines, monks, are stuck to 'being'-view, are gone to 'being'-view, are attached to 'being'-view—they are opposed by 'unbeing'-view. Whosoever recluses and divines, monks, are stuck to 'unbeing'-view, are gone to 'unbeing'-view, are attached to 'unbeing'-view—they are opposed by 'being'-view. Whosoever recluses and divines, monks, do not understand as they really are the arising of, the fall of, the satisfaction in, the misery in and the escape from these two views—they are with lust, they are with hate, they are with delusion, they are with craving, they are with holding, they are foolish, they are with devotion and opposition, they are fond of subjective elaborations, they are not fully released from birth, ageing, death, sorrow, lamentation, unpleasure,



grief, and despair. They are not fully released from suffering, I declare."<sup>1</sup>

These two views, namely 'being'-view (*bhavaditthi*) and 'unbeing'-view (*vibhavaditthi*), leap the *puthujjana* to one or other of two beliefs, i.e. to either the belief in eternalism or the belief in annihilation. The eternalist-belief (*sassatavāda*) is the belief that this (my) self is eternal, and the annihilationist-belief (*ucchadavāda*) is the belief that this (my) self will be annihilated at death. The *puthujjana* reflecting upon his future has no option but to hold to one or other of these two beliefs as his belief or view of his own future. The opposition mentioned in the Sutta passage is particularly effective at this level; that is to say, the believer in eternalism is deterred by annihilationism and the believer in annihilation is deterred by eternalism. Neither is or can be certain of his position.<sup>2</sup>

The Buddha points out that believing in eternalism is due to a 'sticking fast' (*oliyanti*) to 'being': "Men and gods, monks, are loving 'being', are intent on 'being', are delighted in 'being'. When doctrine is set forth for the cessation of 'being' (their) mind does not spring forward (to it), does not brighten, does

1. *Dvemā bhikkhave ditthiyo: bhavaditthi ca vibhavaditthi ca. Ye hi keci bhikkhave samanā vā brāhmaṇā vā bhavaditthim allinā bhavaditthim upagatā bhavaditthim ajjhositā vibhavaditthiyā te pativiruddhā. Ye hi keci bhikkhave samanā vā, brāhmaṇā vā vibhavaditthim allinā vibhavaditthim upagatā vibhavaditthim ajjhositā bhavaditthiyā te pativiruddhā. Ye hi keci bhikkhave samanā vā brāhmaṇā vā imāsaṃ dvinnāṃ ditthiṇaṃ samudyanca atthagamanca assādanca ādinavane nissarananca yathābhūtaṃ nappajānti, te sarāgā te sadosā te samohā te satanhā te saupādānā te aviddasuno te anuruddhapativiruddhā te pāpancaratino te na parimuccanti jātiyā jarāya maranena sokehi paridevehi dukkhehi domanassehi upāyāsehi. Na parimuccanti dukkhasamāti vadāmi.* (*Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 11.*)

2. Belief in an **eternal** life in heaven or hell is certainly, as Bradley hints (*Appearance and Reality*, p. 452), a "degrading superstition"; but then, so is belief in **annihilation**.

It may be noted that the Hindu belief in eternalism is only different in that it believes in a series of finite lives pertaining to a self (*atman*) which finally gets absorbed in a "Universal Consciousness" or some such mysterious thing.



not get steadied, does not get drawn in. Thus, monks, some do stick fast.”<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, in the case of the self-reflexive individual, believing in annihilation, the Buddha teaches, is due to **delighting** in ‘unbeing’ and thereby going to excess or overshooting the mark (*atidhāvanti*).<sup>2</sup> It occurs this way:

The extent and degree of repulsion (*patigha*) from ‘being’ is a variable factor in individuals. Whilst one *puthujjana* would be repelled from certain kinds of feelings, perceptions, etc., another would be repelled from these and more. Some go the whole hog. Consequently, they are repelled from **everything** that falls within ‘being’. They are dissatisfied with their past; they are dissatisfied with the present; and they cannot see any satisfaction in the future which they see will be old age, decrepitude and death. In other words, they are dissatisfied with past, present, and future ‘being’. So they keep looking for a **complete escape** from ‘being’. Now, this dissatisfaction and this looking for an escape from ‘being’, by themselves, are quite wholesome things. It is in fact the basis of all authenticity; and, set in its proper perspective, could become a fruitful approach to the Buddha’s Teaching. This is shown in *Majjhimanikāya*, *Sutta No. 74*, wherein ensues a conversation between the Buddha and the wanderer Dīghanaka who expresses a view almost identical to what we have just described.

“Standing on one side the wanderer Dīghanaka said this to the Auspicious One, ‘I am, master Gotama, of such a belief, of such a view: ‘Everything does not please me’.”

“That view of yours, Aggivessana—‘Everything does not please me’—does that view itself not please you?”

“If, master Gotama, that view would please me, then, that would be just the same, that would be just the same.”

1. *Bhavārāmā bhikkhave devamanussā bhavaratā bhavasammuditā. Tesam bhava nirodhāya dhamme desiyamāne na cittaṃ pakkhandhati na pasdati na santitthati nādhimuccati. Evaṃ kho bhikkhave oḷiyanti eke. (Itivuttaka, Dukanipāta, Dutiyavagga, Sutta No. 12).*

2. Ibid.



"But then, Aggivessana, there are many more in the world who say so—'that would be just the same, that would be just the same'; and then they do not abandon that very view. But Aggivessana, there are much fewer in the world who say so—'that would be just the same, that would be just the same'; and then they abandon that very view and do not take up another view.

"There are, Aggivessana, some recluses and divines with such a belief, with such a view—'Everything pleases me'. There are, Aggivessana, some recluses and divines with such a belief, with such a view—'Everything does not please me'. There are, Aggivessana, some recluses and divines with such a belief, with such a view—'Something pleases me, something does not please me'.

"Therein, Aggivessana, those recluses and divines with such a belief, with such a view—'Everything pleases me'—this view of theirs is close to passion, close to bondage, close to delight, close to attachment, close to holding. Therein, Aggivessana, those recluses and divines with such a belief, with such a view—'Everything does not please me'—this view of theirs is close to dispassion, close to unbinding, close to not delighting, close to detachment, close to not-holding."<sup>1</sup>

1. *Ahaṃ hi bho Gotama evaṃvādi evaṃditthi: sabbaṃ me na khamatīti.*

*Yāpi kho te esā Aggivessana ditthi 'sabbaṃ me na khamatīti' esāpi te ditthi na khamatīti.*

*Esā ce me bho Gotama ditthi kameyyatampassa tādisameva, tampaṃsa tādisamevāti. Ato kho te Aggivessana bhahūhi bahutarā lokasmiṃ ye evamāhansu: tampaṃsa tādisameva, tampaṃsa tādisamevāti. Te tanceva ditthiṃ nappajahanti, aññānca: ditthiṃ upādiyanti. Ato kho te Aggivessana tanūhi tanutarā lokasmiṃ ye evamāhansu tampaṃsa tādisameva, kampaṃsa tādisamevati. Te tañceva ditthiṃ pajahanti. Aññānca ditthiṃ na upādiyanti.*

*Santi Aggivessana eke samanabrāhmaṇā evaṃvādino evaṃditthino: sabbaṃ me khamatīti. Santi Aggivessana eke samanabrāhmaṇā evaṃvādino evaṃditthino: sabbaṃ me na khamatīti. Santi Aggivessana eke samanabrāhmaṇā evaṃvādino evaṃditthino: ekaccaṃ me khamati, ekaccaṃ me na khamatīti.*

*Tatra Aggivessana ye te samanabrāhmaṇā evaṃvādino evaṃditthino sabbaṃ me khamatīti tesamayaṃ ditthi sārāgāya santike saṃyogāya santike abhinandanāya santike ajjhosānāya santike upādānāya santike. Tatra Aggivessana ye te samanabrāhmaṇā evaṃvādino evaṃditthino 'sabbaṃ me na khamatīti', tesamayaṃ ditthi asārāgāya santike asaṃyogāya santike anabhinandanāya santike anajjhosānāya santike anupādānāya santiketi.*



Now, as it is said in the Sutta, 'there are many more in the world' who, without abandoning the view that nothing pleases them, keep **holding** to the view. Consequently, they keep looking for a complete escape from 'being'. But unfortunately, they do not know such an escape that is experiencable **in this life itself**. Not knowing any escape that is experiencable in this life itself, they come to the conclusion or seek comfort in the idea that the only escape which will make an end of it all is **death**. "Some afflicted by 'being', ashamed thereby, loathing it, delight in 'unbeing' (thus): 'Venerable Sir, inasmuch as when body breaks up in death, this (my) self is cut off, is destroyed, does not exist after death—that is the peaceful, that is the excellent, that is the true state of affairs'. Thus, monks, some go to excess."<sup>1</sup>

The *puthujjana* who goes to excess in this fashion is far from being convinced about the matter. After all it is not something that he **can** be truthfully convinced about. But, under the set-up he finds himself in, it at least gives him some consolation; it is the only 'escape' **he** can imagine, thus driving things too far, to regions beyond his reach and vision, i.e. to after-death. His difficulty is of course that he knows no escape from 'being' which can be experienced in this life itself.

The rationalist or materialist too believes in annihilation, and he too does not know an escape from 'being' to be experienced in this life. But in his case the belief in annihilation is not born of self-reflexion. He relishes the belief for another reason; that is, it permits him to enjoy the pleasures of the senses and lose himself in the labyrinthine forms of inauthenticity. It permits him to eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. It is more pleasurable for him to indulge in sensuality **forcing** himself to believe in annihilation. It does not matter to him whether he is **certain** of annihilation or not. Not

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1. *Bhāveneva kho paṇeke attiyamānā harāyamānā jigucchamānā vibhavaṃ abhinandanti: yato kira bho ayaṃ attā kāyassa bhedaṃ parammarānā ucchiṃjati vinassati na hoti parammarānā, etaṃ santaṃ etaṃ paṇītaṃ etaṃ yathāvanti. Evaṃ kho bhikkhave atidhāvanti eke.* (Itivuttaka, Dukanipāta, Dutiyāvagga, Sutta No. 12.)



being a subjective thinker he is not very concerned about it, though of course when old age and death draw near he finds himself not so sure about himself and his views, and becomes rather anxious. Again, after all he **cannot** be truthfully convinced about annihilation. But it is a belief that caters to the promotion of his craving for more and more sensuality.

We said that in the *puthujjana*'s experience there is both craving-for-'being' and craving-for-'unbeing'. This craving-for-'being' is structurally necessary for the present mode of 'being' to remain; and the craving-for-'unbeing' is structurally necessary for change of mode of 'being' to occur. These two cravings are always in conflict—one tending towards stability, the other tending towards change. And the *puthujjana* attempts—sometimes with little success, sometimes with much success, but never with total success—to resolve the conflict by **intensifying** the pleasure in experienced 'being', and so feel **no** need for a different mode of 'being'. In other words, by intensifying the pleasure felt in present 'being', he attempts to make craving-for-'unbeing' vanish, and with that the conflict too. When present 'being' is the most pleasurable in comparison to all possible modes coming within his purview at the time, he does **not** wish it to change. Attention is then very nearly, fully on this present experience and those other possible modes recede far from the sphere of attention; he does not wish to be disturbed. In seeking intensely pleasurable present 'being' he tries to come as close as possible to a goal of 'being' that is wholly desirable and therefore not necessary to change.

Now, the *puthujjana* finds that the **only means** he has for intensifying the pleasurability of his 'being' whenever he finds the need for it is **through** the intensity of pleasantness which occurs in the realm of the five sense-bases—eye, ear, nose, tongue and body. The more sensuous (or sensory) an experience is, the more intense it is; and that applies to both pleasant and unpleasant experience. (An orgasm, for example, is one of the most intensely pleasant experiences.) The increase in pleasurability is however derived only from **pleasant** sensual experience.



Corresponding to the five sense-bases there are five percepts—sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. These percepts **in combination with pleasure** is referred to in the Suttas as *kāma*. *Kāma* can be rendered as **sensuality**. And the foregoing would indicate that this sensuality is both qualitative and quantitative. Thus, the pleasantness occurring in the realm of the five sense-bases, by itself, is not sensuality. It becomes sensuality only when it is dear, lustful, etc. “There are, monks, sights conscious of through the eye . . . . sounds conscious of through the ear . . . . smells conscious of through the nose . . . . tastes conscious of through the tongue . . . . touches conscious of through the body, that are liked, lovely, pleasing, dear, connected with sensuality, lustful. These monks, are called ‘the things to be fettered with’. The desire-and-lust therein,—that is the fetter that is in them.”<sup>1</sup> Thus the five percepts become the five strands-of-sensuality (*kāmaguna*) **only when** they are associated with desire-and-lust, or at the most basic level, only when they are associated with subjectivity. “There are, friend, these five strands-of-sensuality. What five? Sights conscious of through the eye, and are liked, lovely, pleasing, dear, connected with sensuality, lustful; sounds conscious of through the ear . . . .; smells conscious of through the nose . . . .; tastes conscious of through the tongue . . . .; touches conscious of through the body, and are liked, lovely, pleasing, dear, connected with sensuality, lustful. These, friend, are the five strands-of-sensuality.”<sup>2</sup> If there is to be sensuality (*kāma*), **attachment** to these five percepts must be there. It is not a case of mere experience being sensuous:

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1. *Santi bhikkhave cakkhuviññeyya rūpā . . . . sotaviññeyyā saddā . . . . ghānaviññeyyā gandhā . . . . jivhaviññeyyā rasā . . . . kāyaviññeyyā potthabbā itthā kantā manāpā piyarūpā kāmūpasamhitā rajanīyā, ime vuccanti bhikkhave saṃyojanīyā dhammā. Yo tattha chandarāgo taṃ tattha saṃyojanaṃ. (Saṃyuttanikāya IV, Salāyatanā-saṃyutta, Lokakāmagunavagga Sutta No. 9.)*
  2. *Pañca ime āvuso kāmagunā. Katame pañca? Cakkhuviññeyya rūpā itthā kantā manāpā piyarūpā kāmūpasamhitā rajanīyā, sotaviññeyyā saddā . . . ., ghānaviññeyyā gandhā . . . ., jivhaviññeyyā rasā . . . ., kāyaviññeyyā phoṭṭhabbā itthā kantā manāpā piyarūpā kāmūpasamhitā rajanīyā. Ime kho āvuso pañca kāmagunā. (Anguttaranikāya IV, Navakanipāta, Mahāvagga, Sutta No. 3.)*



it is a case of **subjective** experience being sensuous, of 'being' being sensuous. And that is precisely why this sensuality provides the means of resolving the conflict between 'being' and 'unbeing', however much in the end it proves to be quite inadequate for the task.

Lest the reader might be concerned regarding an inaccuracy in the descriptions of the strands of sensuality (*kāmaguna*) given so far, we should point out that these strands-of-sensuality should not be considered **purely** as the percepts. They are **pleasant** percepts, and that means the strands-of-sensuality are, in the strictest sense, name-and-matter (*nāmarūpa*). The question of their being pleasant is one of intention (*cetanā*). In this way, a strand-of-sensuality is more accurately a particular name-and-matter conjoined with subjectivity. We have however laid stress on the percept itself for easiness of description.

All cravings in the *puthujjana's* experience fall under one or three types—craving-for-'being' (*bhavatanhā*), craving-for-'unbeing' (*vibhavatanhā*) and craving-for-sensuality (*kāmatanhā*). "There are, monks, these three cravings. What three? Craving-for-sensuality, craving-for-'being' and craving-for-'unbeing'. These indeed, monks, are three cravings."<sup>1</sup>

Sensuality being what it is, is a difficult thing to examine; simply because, for examination, it has to be brought under reflexion—i.e. under mindfulness-and-awareness (*satisampajanna*)—, and the moment it is brought under reflexion the pleasure aspect of it tends to disappear. Therefore the more we practise (right) reflexion the less sensually pleasurable our lives become. Mindful-and-aware we can perceive the same pleasant percepts, which at times of no mindfulness-and-awareness develop sensuality, and yet find no sensuality developing in us. Herein also lies the key to that virtuous conduct (*sīla*) which the Buddha teaches and lays so much stress upon if one is to develop the path leading to the cessation of all suffering. Seeing

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1. *Tisso imā bhikkhave tanhā. Katamā tisso? Kāmatanhā bhavatanhā vibhavatanhā. Imākho bhikkhave tisso tanhā ti. (Itivuttaka, Sutta No. 58.)*



sensuality and craving-for-sensuality at their surface level, or as they outwardly appear, is however, not a difficult thing; and the *puthujjana* does see them at this level. But seeing them at their root-structural level is quite another matter. It is to see them at this latter level that the Buddha's Teaching is necessary. Further, it is only when they are seen at their root-structural level that they are seen in the true sense of the word.

Incidentally, the *Visuddhimagga* makes a bit of a hash out of *kāmatanhā*, *bhavatanhā* and *vibhavatanhā*. It says: "When craving for sight (or for what is seen) manifests itself as a sensual satisfaction, relishing the (visual) object that has come within the range of the eye, that is called *kāmatanhā*. When that (craving) occurs with the eternalist view, 'Lasting, eternal', as basis, that is called *bhavatanhā*, for it is the lust accompanying the eternalist view that is called *bhavatanhā*. And when that (craving) occurs with the annihilationist view, 'Breaking up, perishing', as basis, that is called *vibhavatanhā*, for it is the lust accompanying the annihilationist view that is called *vibhavatanhā*."<sup>1</sup> Now, between the eternalist view (or the annihilationist view) and the craving for a sweet taste what relationship can indeed be established that is not wholly gratuitous? It is certainly not denied that a relationship could be established. What is denied is that there is an **essential** or **meaningful** relationship between these two **views** and the craving for the sweet taste; and what is objected to is that these interpretations in no way advance one's understanding of *tanhā*. That is not all. The *sekha*—i.e. the noble disciple who understands the Buddha's Teaching—has neither the eternalist view nor the annihilationist view. So that, according to the *Visuddhimagga*,

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1. *Rūpatanhā yeva hi yada cakkhussa apatham agatam rūparammanam kamassadavasena assadayamana pavattati tada kamata hannama hoti; yada tadevarammanam duvam sassatanti pavattaya sassataditthiya saddhim pavattati, tada bhavatanhā nāma hoti, sassataditthisahagato hi rāgo bhavatanhā ti vuccati; yadapana tadevarammanam ucchijjati vinassati ti pavattaya ucchedaditthiya saddhim pavattati tada vibhavatanhā nāma hoti, ucchedaditthisahagato hi rāgo vibhavatanhā ti vuccati (Visuddhimagga, Ch. XVII.)*



only the *sekha* can experience *kāmatanhā*; and the *puthujjana*—who will **always** have one or other of these two views—only can experience *bhavatanhā* or *vibhavatanhā*. Yet another mistake is that *bhavatanhā* and *vibhavatanhā* are identified as kinds of lust—*rāga*. The Suttas speak differently. They say that *chanda-rāga*—i.e. desire-and-lust—are **dependent** upon *tanhā*.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, *tanhā* is not such an easy thing to sort out as the *Visuddhimagga* makes it out to be; and all these rationalizations and over-simplifications only cause confusion worse confounded. This so very facile explanation of *kāmatanhā*, *bhavatanhā* and *vibhavatanhā* found in the *Visuddhimagga* is itself sufficient to validate the unfavourable comments we made of this exegetical book in Chapter II.

The five strands-of-sensuality, pertaining as they are to human 'being' are qualified by the Buddha as being the "five human strands-of-sensuality" (*manussa pañca kāmāgāṇa*)<sup>2</sup>. He makes this qualification only in order to inform us that the sensuality pertaining to celestial sensuous 'being' (*dibbakāma*)<sup>3</sup> is of a higher and finer order than the human.

Now, the pleasure associated with sensuality may be called the **sensual-pleasure** (*kāmasukha*). "Whatever indeed, friend, is the pleasure and joy that arises dependent upon these five strands of sensuality—that, friend, is called sensual-pleasure."<sup>4</sup> It is also the **satisfaction** of sensuality (*kāmanam assādo*). "Whatever indeed, monks, is the pleasure and joy that arises dependent upon these five strands of sensuality—that is the satisfaction of sensuality."<sup>5</sup>

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1. This relationship between *chandarāga* (desire-and-lust) and *tanhā* (craving) will be dealt with later in this Chapter.

2. *Samyuttanikāya V, Sotāpattisaṃyutta, Sapphāñṇavagga, Sutta No. 4.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Yaṃ kho āvuso ime pañca kāmāgāṇe paṭicca uppajjati sukhaṃ somanassaṃ, idaṃ vuccati āvuso kāmasukhaṃ. (Anguttaranikāya IV, Navakanipāta, Mahāvagga, Sutta No. 3.)*

5. *Yaṃ kho bhikkhave ime pañca kāmāgāṇe paṭicca uppajjati sukhaṃ somanassaṃ ayaṃ kāmānaṃ assādo. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 13.)*



say that the sore (*vana*) is the conceit '(I) am' (*asmimāna*); the wanting to scratch is the craving-for-sensuality (*kāmatanhā*); the scratching is the indulgence in sensuality (*kāma*); and the pleasure and the satisfaction derived from the scratching is the pleasure and satisfaction in the indulgence in sensuality (*kāmasukha kāmanam assādo*). And just as the pleasure of the scratch is inevitably followed by unpleasure and misery, so is the pleasure and satisfaction in sensuality. Unfortunately, this unpleasure that follows is greater than the pleasure. "Friend, the Auspicious One has declared that sensuality is just involving time (in order that its fruit which is unpleasure matures), is of much unpleasure, is of much despair, is having more misery (or dissatisfaction, or disappointment) in it."<sup>1</sup> The intelligent and observant *puthujjana* may see that sensuality ends in unpleasure. But there is nothing he can do about it, because sensual-pleasure is the only refuge from unpleasure that he knows. When he is experiencing sensual-pleasure he craves for more of it, perhaps of a different variety; and when he is not experiencing sensual-pleasure, then also he craves for sensual-pleasure. Thus, in the structure of the *puthujjana's* experience there is always this craving-for-sensuality along with craving-for-'being' and craving-for-'unbeing'. And just as much as holding (*upādāna*) must be present for 'being' (*bhava*) to be there, craving (*tanhā*) must be present for holding (*upādāna*) to be there. So we have the Buddha teaching us: "With craving as condition, holding; with holding as condition 'being' "—*tanhāpaccayā upādānañ; upādāna paccayā bhavo*.<sup>2</sup>

The strands-of-sensuality, we may note whilst passing, are dependent upon amenities (*bhoga*)<sup>3</sup> which are external material things (*āmisa*)<sup>4</sup>. To have the pleasure of sensuality one must have sensuality itself; to have sensuality one must have the

1. *Kālikā hi āvuso kāmā vuttā Bhagavatā bahudukkhā bahūpāyāsā ādīnavo ettha bhiyyo.* (*Samyuttanikāya I, Devatāsaṃyutta, Nandanavagga, Sutta No. 10*).

2. *Samyuttanikāya II, Abhisamayasaṃyutta, Buddhavagga, Sutta No. 2.*

3. *Anguttaranikāya IV, Sīhanādavagga, Sutta No. 20.*

4. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 3.*



strands-of-sensuality; and to have the strands of sensuality one must have amenities, since these amenities are the external things that have to be contacted in order that the strands-of-sensuality may arise. They take the form of tasty foods, wines, musical instruments, sex, etc. In the context of present day society it all means one must have money. So that to experience sensual-pleasure one must possess amenities, and this means one has to work for it. In the *Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta*<sup>1</sup> the Buddha indicates how the average individual craving for sensuality undergoes much unpleasure in the process. He has to work daily, and this work itself is in the main unpleasant business. Then when he comes to possess the required amenities he has the task of protecting them, which again is unpleasant business. If he is born to opulence and so has amenities without having to work for them, still the unpleasure that follows the pleasure of sensuality and matures as time goes by is in excess of the pleasure. When old age creeps in, the matter becomes really serious, unpleasure becomes more and more acute, culminating in the most unwelcome apprehension of imminent death.

We can see in experience that of the three, *kāmatanhā*, *bhavatanhā* and *vibhavatanhā*, the last two are more potent than the first; and that is because *bhavatanhā* and *vibhavatanhā* involve 'self' more directly and explicitly than *kāmatanhā* does. **Being** 'I', 'mine' and 'self' are of more fundamental importance than those **things** that are considered **as being** 'I', 'mine' and 'self'; and the strands of sensuality (*kāmaguna*) are only things that are so considered. Herein also lies the reason why the *puthujjana* can be led to holding some belief in the eternal existence of a self (or soul, or ego, etc.)—in a sort of eternal metaphysical existence that he thinks would be **free** from sensual pleasure and from the prison walls of his mutable body. It is to this belief that all religious faiths fundamentally and essentially cater, though their catering may take different forms. Mysticism is dependent upon *bhavatanhā*. The Mystic's 'Union with the

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1. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 13.*



Divine' or 'Beatific Vision'—or whatever else he wishes to call it—is *upādāna* in a very subtle and fine form.

*Tanhā* is a necessary part of the structure of 'being'. It is necessary because 'being' cannot otherwise **continue** to be 'being'. *Tanhā* is therefore not the coarse hankering after what we do **not** have. This hankering after the things of the world is termed *abhijjā*, which can be rendered as **covetousness**. Covetousness (*abhijjā*) is a coarse layer that stands over *tanhā*; *Tanhā* is the subtle craving for **more** of what we already have. *Bhavatanhā*—craving-for-'being'—is really craving-for-**more**-'being', or craving-for-furtherance-of-'being'. The **mode** of 'being' craved for is always secondary, though necessarily tied up and inseparable since 'being' is always 'being-in-some-mode'. (The switching from mode to mode is determined by *vibhava-tanhā*.) When the stomach is in hunger, food is wanted. The **type** of food—rice or bread, or whatever else that is eaten—is secondary though necessarily and inseparably tied up with the eating, since eating is always eating-some-food. However, we must note that unlike the hunger of the stomach, *bhavatanhā* can never be appeased. When the stomach is full, hunger is appeased, at least temporarily. Not so with *bhavatanhā*, simply because it is always a craving for **more** 'being' or for **furtherance** of 'being', or for **continuing** 'being'.

At the most subtle level this situation is as follows—a situation which, however, is more difficult to see:

Satisfaction (*assādo*) is the satisfaction of **craving** (*tanhā*). But this satisfaction of craving is not the **appeasement** of craving. On the contrary, it is the **continuation** of craving. It is not **things** we crave for fundamentally, it is the **pursuit** of things. In other words we fundamentally **crave for craving**. Craving-for-'being' (*bhavatanhā*), at its most fundamental level, is the craving for craving for 'I am'; and craving depends upon this craving for craving. That craving depends upon craving for craving is, as we will see in Chapter XII, similar to the fact that non-knowledge depends upon non-knowledge of non-knowledge. In the *Dīghanikāya, Sutta No. 22*, there



is not only craving for things such as sight, sound, smell, etc., but there is also a craving for craving-for-sight (*tanhā* for *rūpatanhā*), for craving-for-sound, for craving-for-smell etc. In the *Samyuttanikāya II, Rāhulasamyutta, Pathamavagga, Sutta No. 8* it is said: "Thus seeing, Rahula, the instructed noble disciple turns away from craving-for-sight, turns away from craving-for-sound, . . . . craving-for-smell . . . . craving-for-taste . . . . craving-for-touch, turns away from craving-for-ideas. Turning away, he loses passion. . . ." <sup>1</sup> This turning away from craving is only because there is craving for craving. If there is no craving for craving, there is no necessity to turn away from craving, And to turn away from craving is to give up this craving for craving.

If, in order to help understand the above, we offer a simile at a simple level it may be as follows: A man wishes (hungers) to enjoy tasty food. But if he is to enjoy tasty food he must be hungry. So he must **like to be hungry**: because it is only if he is hungry that he can enjoy tasty food. He is thus hungry for hunger. And that is why one hears the statement, 'I love to be hungry.'

One other thing.

Apart from craving for pleasant sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches, there is also a craving for pleasant images or ideas (*dhamma*). In Pali, this craving is called *dhammatanhā*. Thus craving for 'I am' would be a *dhammatanhā*; so would craving for craving. These *dhamma* or images craved for are not included in the standard definition of the strands-of-sensuality which are five in number. But it is probably wrong to think that each and every *dhammatanhā* falls outside the sphere of *kāmatanhā*, i.e. outside the sphere of craving-for-sensuality. An image or idea (*dhamma*) is very often involved with one or other of the five pleasant percepts—pleasant sight, pleasant

1. *Evaṃ passaṃ Rāhula sutavā ariyasāvako rūpatanhāyapi nibbindati saddatanhāyapi nibbindati . . . . gandhatanhāyapi . . . . rasatanhāyāpi . . . . poṭṭhabbatanhāyapi . . . . dhammatanhāyapi nibbindati. Nibbindaṃ virajjati . . . .* (*Samyuttanikāya II, Rāhulasamyutta, Pathamavagga, Sutta No. 8.*)



sound, pleasant smell, pleasant taste and pleasant touch. For this reason, certain *dhammatanhā* at least could be considered as very subtle forms of *kāmatanhā* as against the gross form of *kāmatanhā* which is a direct craving for the five strands-of-sensuality.

Further, it should be noted that the three categories of craving, viz., craving-for-'being', craving-for-'unbeing' and craving-for-sensuality, (*bhavatanhā*, *vibhavatanhā* and *kāmatanhā*) which we have discussed embrace within their orbits craving for all aspects of 'being'. In the *Dīghanikāya, Sutta No. 22*, these aspects are grouped under ten categories. These categories are: craving for (1) the sense organs, (2) the percepts, (3) consciousness, (4) contact, (5) feeling born of contact, (6) perception, (7) intention (intended intention, *sancetanā*), (8) craving, (9) thinking, and (10) pondering. Each of the categories again get subdivided into six either in relation to the six sense organs (internal bases) or the six percepts (external bases). For example, craving for contact would be craving for contact by eye, by ear, by nose, by tongue, by body and by mind; and craving for intention (intended intention) would be craving for intention regarding sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and idea. In the first chapter (*Pathamavagga*) of the *Samyuttanikāya II, Rāhulasamyutta*, the ten groupings take a slightly different form. They are craving for (1) the sense organs, (2) the percepts, (3) consciousness, (4) contact, (5) feeling born of contact, (6) perception, (7) intention (intended intention, *sancetanā*), (8) craving, (9) the six elements (earth, water, fire, air, space and consciousness), and (10) the five aggregates. Here again each of the categories get subdivided into six either in relation to the six sense organs or the six percepts. But whichever group of ten we take into consideration it comes to the same thing, viz., craving for all the aspects of 'being'.

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In the Pali Suttas the words *tanhā*, *chanda*, *rāga* and *nandi* often come together, as in the phrase: *yo chando yo rāgo yā nandi yā tanhā ya upāyupādānā*.<sup>1</sup> Very often the words *chanda*, *rāga* and *nandi* are considered as being almost identical with *tanhā*, or as being various 'shades' of *tanhā*. This is wrong. *Chanda*, *rāga* and *nandi* have their own meaning. *Chanda* or *nandi* is **desire**, *rāga* is **lust**. The following Sutta passage indicates that *chanda* and *rāga* (i.e. desire and lust) are things **dependent upon** *tanhā*; "Thus it is, Ananda, that *tanhā* is dependent upon feeling, pursuit dependent upon *tanhā*, gain dependent upon pursuit, anticipation dependent upon gain, desire-and-lust dependent upon anticipation . . ."<sup>2</sup> *Chanda* and *rāga* are described as "rooted in *tanhā*" (*tanhāmūlakā*)<sup>3</sup>. Further, the Buddha has described *chanda*, *rāga* and *nandi* as *upādāna* (see p. . . .). *Chanda*, *rāga* and *nandi* are the more explicit forms of *upādāna*; and *upādāna* is something dependent upon *tanhā*. Quite clearly, it is wrong to assume that *chanda*, *rāga* and *nandi* are various 'shades' of *tanhā*.<sup>4</sup> The Buddha also tells us that there are nine things rooted in *tanha*. "Monks, I will preach the nine things rooted in *tanhā* . . . . And what monks are the nine things rooted in *tanhā*? Dependent upon *tanhā*, seeking; dependent upon seeking, gain; dependent upon gain, anticipation; dependent upon anticipation, desire-and-lust; dependent upon desire-and-lust, attachment; dependent upon attachment, possession; dependent upon possession, jealousy; dependent upon jealousy, guarding; because of guarding,

1. For example, see *Samyuttanikāya III, Rādhasamyutta, Sutta No. 3*.

2. *Iti kho Ānanda vedanaṃ paticca tanhā, tanhaṃ paticca pariyesanā, pariyesanaṃ paticca lābho, lābhaṃ paticca vinicchayo, vinicchayaṃ paticca chandarāgo . . . .* (*Dīghanikāya, Sutta No. 15*).

3. *Anguttaranikāya IV, Navakanipāta, Sattāvāsavagga, Sutta No. 3*.

4. It is necessary to point out that this type of approximation is very misleading and far from helpful. It is again resultant from disinterested scholarship that does not seek the meaning of the Suttas in personal experience. The aim is at approximation that would satisfy scholarship, not at that certainty that is necessary to satisfy the individual interested in making use of the Suttas for his personal welfare.



taking up of clubs and knives, fights, disputes, quarrels, contention, slander, lying, and various evil unprofitable things come to be.”<sup>1</sup> Often, as in the above, we find *chanda* and *rāga* (desire and lust), like wise *nandi* and *rāga*, in combination as a compound word—*chandarāga* and *nandirāga*. The difference between *chanda* or *nandi* (desire) and *rāga* (lust) seems to be one of degree rather than of kind. The word *rāga* can also be rendered as ‘passion’ as in *rāgaggi* (fire of passion).

Further, craving (*tanhā*), desire (*chanda* or *nandi*), and lust (*rāga*) are all **supports** for ‘being’ (*bhava*), in that ‘being’ depends upon these. Being ‘I’, or ‘self’-existence stands supported by these, stands dependent upon these. They are therefore called the “lead to ‘being’” (*bhavanetti*). “That desire, that lust, that delight, that craving, that engaging and holding, that mental resolving, adherence and tendency—that is called the lead to ‘being’.”<sup>2</sup> This desiring, etc., is of course towards matter, feeling, perception, determinations and consciousness.

In a simile<sup>3</sup> the Buddha likens ‘being’ to a bunch of mangoes whilst the lead to ‘being’ is likened to a stalk. Just as the bunch of mangoes exists hanging by the stalk, so does ‘being’ exist supported by its lead of craving, desire, etc. For ‘being’ to be there, the lead to ‘being’ must be there.

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1. *Nava bhikkhave tanhāmūlake dhamme desessāmi . . . . Katame ca bhikkhave nava tanhāmūlakā dhammā? Tanhaṃ paticca pariyesanū, pariyesanaṃ paticca lābho, lābham paticca vinicchayo, vinicchayaṃ paticca chandarāgo chandarāgaṃ paticca ajjhosaṇaṃ, ajjhosaṇaṃ paticca pariggaaho, pariggahaṃ paticca macchariyaṃ macchariyaṃ paticca ārakkhādhikaranaṃ, dandādānasatthūdanakalahaviggahaviḍḍā tuvaṃtuvaṃpesāṇaṃuavādā aneke pāpakā akusalā dhammā sambhavanti.* (*Anguttaranikāya IV, Navakanipāta, Sattāvāsavagga, Sutta No. 3.*)

2. *To chando yo rāgo yā nandi yā tanhā yā upāyupādānā cetaso adhiṭṭhānābhinivesānu-sāyā ayaṃ vuccati bhavanetti.* (*Samyuttanikāya III, Rādhasamyutta, Sutta No. 3.*)

3. This simile is given in *Dīghanikāya, Sutta No. 1.*



## CHAPTER IX

### THE STRUCTURE OF CHANGE

Beyond saying that things are subject to the three characteristics of **arising, passing away and changing whilst standing**, the Buddha does not seem to have gone into an analysis of the phenomenon called change or impermanence. This might surprise the thinker of today; but it is not difficult to understand why. The reason is: provided a man does not have any preconceived notions about the structure of change or impermanence, an understanding of this structure beyond what the Buddha taught is not necessary for attaining the cessation of suffering. The intelligent *puthujjana* observes that there is such a thing as change or impermanence. He observes that the things in his world do change from time to time; and the Buddha informs him very definitely that there is nothing that exists that does not change, and that sooner or later all existing things disappear or come to an end. Now, when he takes this fact into consideration seriously and applies it to his own existence, it is enough, given certain other conditions of course, to lead him on to understanding and to the end of suffering. The Suttas indicate that the Buddha did not encourage philosophical or metaphysical investigation into matters that do not lead to the end of suffering, for the very good reason that a man might spend a lifetime of fruitless investigation and discussion of such matters and die unsatisfied, where otherwise he might have attained the goal if he attended to the right things. (In the *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 2*, the Buddha summarizes what things are to be attended to and what things are not to be attended to.)

But if the Buddha did not, why do **we** have to raise the question of the structure of change?

The reason is that today we are, unfortunately, in a worse position than the average listener of the Buddha's day was. From our early childhood, whether from a nurse or a school-master or from uncritical reading of philosophic and scientific



writings, we have come to learn and accept the idea that change is 'continuous', or that impermanence means that things are in a state of 'flux', are 'becoming', are 'processes', etc., and of course we keep repeating these things, never for a moment pausing to determine what all this means, or whether in fact they have any meaning at all. Our understanding of impermanence or change has been clouded by these rationalizations.

The question of change (and also movement) has consequently become notoriously puzzling and not easily sorted out. But yet these definitions of change as 'flux', 'becoming', etc. would not concern us were it not for the fact that they have become a chief source of the current misinterpretations of the Buddha's Teaching. In particular, these definitions have led to the quite erroneous but widespread view that "since everything is always changing nothing **really** exists, and it is only our ignorance that makes us think that things do exist." Therefore we see a necessity to weed out this fallacious notion of continuous change or flux and return to **actual** experience of this thing called change.

Let us first consider physical objects.

We are told that the object is continuously changing or that it is in a state of flux. But the trouble arises when the view is extended and it is said that the object, such as the table before me, is not the same object from one moment to the next, and therefore the object does not "really" exist. Nevertheless the view that 'the table is there' is much more valid in experience; and this latter view is valid notwithstanding the changes that are taking place (changes which may or may not be perceptible to me) so long as the table can be treated as the same table. The distinction between the view of 'continuous change' or 'flux' and the view that 'the table is there' is of utmost importance, because it marks the distinction between the theoretical-postulational view and the existential or phenomenological view.

But are these two views compatible? If not, which is the correct one?



The first comment we have to make here is that continuous change or flux is **not**—repeat, **not**—a matter for observation. In order for us to say 'this has changed' two things are necessary; that is, (1) sameness or identity, and (2) not-sameness or difference. Unless there is something that **remains the same** we cannot say 'this', and unless there is something **different** we cannot say 'changed'.

Consider a simple case: Suppose there is a large crimson coloured wall where I perceive only the colour. After some time I notice that 'the crimson has faded'. How is this to be understood? Clearly, if I look at the wall one day and find that it is blue I shall not say that 'the crimson has faded', for the valid reason that blue is totally different from crimson. In such a case I shall only say that the wall has changed its colour. But if I say 'the crimson has faded' I am saying that the wall is still crimson in colour but is of a lighter shade of crimson. What remains the same here is the general determination 'crimson', and what is different is the **particular shade** of crimson.

The above indicates that what remains the same or remains invariable is the more **general** feature, whilst the **subordinate** or more **particular** feature varies. In our example the general feature is the **crimson colour**, whilst the particular feature is the **shade**. A **general** embraces two or more **particulars** in such a way that each **particular** thing is an **example** or **instance** of the more **general** thing. Each shade of crimson is a particular instance of the crimson colour in general. From this it follows that any two particulars can be interchanged without affecting the general. This shade is crimson, and that shade too is crimson. There is a **change** in the particular **shade** of crimson, but an **unchange** or **sameness** in the general **colour** crimson. It also follows that if the general changes then all the particulars change. If the crimson changes to blue we will find only shades of blue but no shades of crimson at all. Further, if we wish to determine what the general is, all we have to do is to put two or more particulars together and see what they have **in common**. The common is the



general. In fact whenever two particulars are found together they *ipso facto* reveal a general. It may sometimes be difficult to say what precisely the general is; or it may be that the general revealed is only an abstract idea which is perceived when the two particulars are found together. A general can also be considered as the 'togetherness' of different particulars.

We can see how this state of affairs is applicable to the human being too. From infant to child, child to adult, adult to old man—all these are changes to particulars. But whilst these changes occur, the **general**—'human being'—remains the same, and each of the particulars—infant, child, adult, old man—are an **instance** of this general called 'human being'. Note that, here, we are looking at the phenomenon called 'human being' in an objective fashion, as we would look at some physical object, and **not** as a 'self', which is quite a different matter, though more difficult and of the highest importance from the point of view of suffering.

Now the fact that the general remains unchanged whilst the particular changes points to the possibility of a certain **structure of change** which has to be taken into account whenever we consider the question of change; and if this is so it will mean that the idea that '**everything** is changing' needs strict qualification. If then we can make a clear-cut distinction between those features that do not vary and those that do (within a given period of time of course) it will follow that the distinction between **sameness** and **difference** is absolute. In other words, we cannot then say 'approximately the same' or 'approximately different', for so long as we use the word 'approximate' it will be an indication that we have failed to make the distinction clear-cut, since 'approximately the same' means 'the same but with a difference' and 'approximately different' means 'different but partly the same'. Now if the distinction between sameness and difference is absolute it will follow that all changes take place **discontinuously**, for it then means that 'same' means absolutely the same and 'different' means absolutely different, and there can be no intermediate category between sameness and difference.



But it might be considered absurd to speak of the colour of the wall 'fading discontinuously', and from the common sense point of view we agree that it would be. Nevertheless the fact remains that we do **not** perceive the 'crimson fading' continuously. What really happens is that one nice day we perceive that the 'crimson has faded', and this is a sudden perception. After a few more days we perceive that the 'crimson has faded further'; this too is a sudden perception. And so we **infer** that all this time the colour of the wall has been fading **gradually** or **continuously**, but **without our perceiving it**. The important fact is that between the perception of the first shade and the perception of the second shade which is different from the first shade, we did **not** perceive a continuity in the change from first shade to second shade. And this position holds **however often** we perceive the colour of the wall. If the first shade of crimson perceived yesterday was  $X_1$ , and today after twenty-four hours we perceive the shade as  $X_2$ , the change from  $X_1$  to  $X_2$  is perceived as sudden and discontinuous. Suppose without waiting for twenty-four hours we perceive the colour only twelve hours after perceiving the colour of shade  $X_1$ . Let us call the shade after twelve hours  $X_3$ . There too the change of shade from  $X_1$  to  $X_3$  when perceived (after twelve hours) will be perceived as sudden and discontinuous. Even if we perceive the colour after six hours, again the change of shade from  $X_1$  to the shade after six hours (say  $X_4$ ) would be perceived as sudden and discontinuous. We can go on like this splitting the time interval between the consecutive perceptions of shade into smaller and smaller units. But however small the time interval be, the change will be perceived as sudden and discontinuous. Now if we are to **completely eliminate** discontinuity in the perception of change we will have to reduce our time interval between two consecutive perceptions to zero, which then means we will be left with the thing (the shade of the colour in this case) as **not existing at all**. For a thing to exist it must



exist **for some time or other**.<sup>1</sup> This is why the concept of continuous change or flux and the theory that 'nothing really exists' are complimentary to one another. This is also why the contradiction termed 'absolute shortness of time' is introduced when working with the notion of continuous change or flux. (Absolute shortness of time is **no** time; and if a thing exists only for the absolute shortness of time it means that it does not exist at all). But the matter does not end at that, because, inspite of the notion of continuous change or flux, practical experience does not permit us to say that a thing does not exist at all. So, pat comes the solution; the thing is and is not. In other words, A is not-A. The result: mysticism.

The above comments apply to the perception of anything changing. As another example, take a light fading out. From 'steady light' to 'fading light' there is a distinction, and from 'fading light' to 'darkness' also there is a distinction. At the higher level of generality there is the distinction between 'light' (steady and fading) and 'darkness'. The change from any one of these to the other when perceived is perceived as discontinuous. So is the position within 'fading light' itself which one is tempted to think more seriously as continuously changing in luminosity. The change from one degree of luminosity to the next is perceived as discontinuous and sudden even though the time interval involved is extremely short and even though there is steady and uninterrupted perception of the 'fading light'.

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1. When in order to prove that all is in continuous flux, Heraclitus stated that one could not cross the same river twice, a disciple of his stated that if all is in continuous flux one could not cross the same river even once. In *Kierkegaard's Authorship* by George E. Arbaugh and George B. Arbaugh, p. 105, it is said that Kierkegaard criticized Heraclitus' disciple as being foolish in going 'farther'. But what Kierkegaard does not see is that the disciple **had** to go 'farther', and in doing so only drove Heraclitus' theory of continuous flux to its inevitable conclusion. If **everything** is in continuous flux, nothing **is**. For a thing to **be** it must remain unchanged. If the river and the individual are **both** in continuous flux (and if everything is in continuous flux it is illegitimate to exclude the individual from being in continuous flux), then there is neither a river nor an individual; hence also no crossing as envisaged by Heraclitus.



Whenever a perceived change is described as 'taking place continuously' it means that either the necessary analysis of a complex experience is beyond the power of the perceiver, or else that, unwittingly, a theoretical-postulation has crept into his description of his experience. That we have perception of movement and such other changes is certainly not to be denied, and quite possibly it is the perception of movement that leads us to the view of continuous change or flux; but these experiences are notoriously difficult to describe. They involve the hierarchy of past, present and future, and yet are perceived as present things. Consequently the problem of movement or motion has always puzzled philosophers.

Thus all experience that we may describe as continuous change or flux can be adequately described in terms of **discontinuous changes at different levels of generality**. The contradiction involved in the notion of continuous change or flux arises from the failure to see that the perception of change at any given level of generality **must** be discontinuous and **absolute**, and that there **must** be various levels of generality. (The shade  $X_1$  is absolutely different from the shade  $X_2$ , and also from the shade  $X_3$ , and so on). When these are taken together any desired approximation to continuous change can be obtained without contradiction. As Wittgenstein would say: "We have got on to slippery ice there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need **friction**. Back to rough ground!"<sup>1</sup>

It may be said that the idea of continuous change is a matter of observation which accords with the scientific view that matter is subject to continuous change. But, as we pointed out earlier, continuous change or flux is **not** a matter of observation; it is purely and simply a theoretical consequence of the scientific claim to achieve complete objectivity. As soon as the observer

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1. *Philosophical Investigations* by Ludwig Wittgenstein (translated by G. E. M. Anscombe), p. 46.



is reinstated, as in quantum theory, change becomes **discontinuous**.

Quantum theory speaks of both 'invariants' and 'transformations'. And of course as soon as one says 'invariant' one rules out flux. The idea of 'invariance under transformation' or 'identity under difference' which does away with the notion of continuous change of flux is not very new. F. H. Bradley who wrote in the latter part of the last century got the idea from earlier writers. (Actually, Bradley accepts the principle of identity on the **ideal** level, but does not reject a **real** continuous change). The Pythagoreans believed that things were composed of discontinuous units. But the idea went out of fashion with the advent of Logical Positivism—a name given by Blumberg and Feigl (1931) to the philosophical movement which emanated from the 'Vienna Circle' presided over by Moritz Schlick. Logical Positivism preaches a quasi-scientific philosophy which is a through-going empiricism backed by modern logic and tempered by an exaggerated respect for the achievements of modern science. The logic concerned in this philosophy is, historically, the logic of Frege and Bertrand Russell. But these logical positivists are **most** misleading, particularly Russell whose philosophizings (often overrated) do not carry the same penetrative vision as those of men like Heidegger, Satre, or even Wittgenstein.<sup>1</sup> Presently, however, we find that these ideas of 'invariance under transformation' and 'discontinuous change' have once again returned to favour in quantum theory which even speaks of things like "the discontinuous character of atomic processes".<sup>2</sup>

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1. For example, note Russell's solution, *vide* his *Mysticism and Logic*, Ch.IX to the problem posed by Zeno's Elastic Arrow. The problem is not as easily solved as Russell likes to think. The solution offered by him solves the problem by leaving it out. The problem is: What is time? are always inseparably present where there is existence. To describe anyone is to describe the other two.

2. Ernest Nagel in *The structure of Science* (p. 295) quoting Werner Heisenberg in *The Physical Principle of the Quantum Theory*.



Finally, in defence of the notion of continuous change or flux, it might be said as follows: Even if I **now** perceive things as self-identically persisting in time, my present perception is only one out of a flux or continuous succession of perceptions, and there is no guarantee that I continue to perceive the **same** self-identities for two successive instants; and therefore all I am entitled to say is that there **appear** to be self-identities persisting in time, but whether it is so or not **in reality**, I am quite unable to discover.

But this argument is wanting in four directions: (1) It presumes a rational view of time, and uses that same view to question the validity of reflexive experience. But this rational view of time is itself ultimately derived from or founded upon direct reflexive experience, for how are we to know what time is if not from our own experience? Therefore here it is a case wherein something that is founded upon direct reflexive experience is being used to undermine that same reflexive experience. Such an action is quite illegitimate. The error is in the act of rationalization, i.e. in trying to see time objectively, from a point outside of it. And the result is: a continuous succession of isolated moments, each of no duration, and each with no past or future since from the timeless (or no duration) point of view they are all present,—an utter monstrosity. In addition, the distinction between ‘appearance’ and ‘reality’ is, as we have had occasion to point out earlier, completely ungenueine. (2) Our knowledge of time comes only from the perception of change. It is therefore necessary to determine the nature or the structure of change before we can come to know the structure of time. (3) Whether we actually perceive continuous change or not, we most certainly perceive discontinuous changes. This position being admitted, there is at least a *prima facie* case in favour of discontinuous change. (4) The experiments of the Gestalt psychologists (*Gestalt* is a German word meaning ‘shape’ or ‘form’ or ‘structure’) indicate that we perceive only discontinuous changes and not continuous change.



Our undeniable experience of movement and similar things such as fading lights will no doubt be adduced as evidence for continuous change—indeed, it will be said that they **are** continuous changes. That movement is evidence for what it is, is quite certain; but it is not so certain that it is evidence for continuous change. We may understand movement as, at each level of generality, a succession of continuous fixed finite **trajectories**, and each such trajectory, at the next lower level, as a relatively faster succession of lesser trajectories, and so on indefinitely. But our ability to perceive distinctions is limited, and this hierarchy of trajectories is anomalously apprehended as a series of discrete continuities of displacement—which is, precisely, what we are accustomed to call **movement**. When we go to the cinema we sit in front of a screen and spend two or three hours ‘perceiving moving pictures’, perfectly satisfied that we **do** perceive movement at the cinema. The only difference from the live theatre is the flatness of the screen and the colouring, and we can be as much excited or emotionally disturbed by a cinema show as we are by a theatre performance. However, when we pause to consider the mechanism of the cinema, we come to understand that (looking at the matter from a slightly different point of view) all we really perceive is a succession of perfectly still pictures. And this being so, we are obliged to admit that perception of movement **need not be evidence of continuous change**, that we **cannot safely infer** ‘continuous change’ from ‘perception of movement’. Consideration of the mechanism of the cinematograph is enough to show that continuous change cannot safely be inferred from the experience of movement; but it must not be supposed that the structure of movement can be reduced simply to the structure of the cinematograph.

Now we come to the question of mental objects, or as some would say, states of mind. Here again the idea of continuous change or flux does not apply to them, and the current interpretation (now almost orthodox in Theravada circles) regarding mental states as being no less a flux than physical objects is wrong. Here is a typical example: “The stream of self-



awareness that the uninstructed conceive to be a soul is made up of point-moments of consciousness, each of which has no more than a momentary duration." This is pure speculation, with no relation at all to actual experience.

Once the notion of continuous change or flux is ruled out we find that the structure of change of mental states (or mental objects) has much more in common with that of physical objects than might appear at first sight. Mental states such as grief, joy, etc. appear, persist, and vanish. This is true of physical objects also. And we find that **all** experience—whether of physical objects or mental objects—is subject to three characteristics, namely, (1) arising, (2) passing away, and (3) changing whilst standing. In the Suttas the first characteristic is termed *uppāda*, the second *vaya*, and the third *thitassa aññathattam*.<sup>1</sup> This third characteristic which may also be referred to as "other-wiseness in persistence" or "difference in sameness" can be understood to express the combination of absolute sameness and absolute difference as the essential structure of change or impermanence. In a simpler way we can consider this characteristic of change whilst standing as a **change within itself whilst the thing endures as the self-same thing**. When all these three characteristics are taken into account it means that **a thing arises and passes away, and between its arising and passing away it endures as the same thing whilst changes occur to it at subordinate levels of generality**. And this situation holds good up to the highest and most supreme level of generality in experience. Each set of five-holding-aggregates, or each experience, whether as an infant, child, adult, or old man, would be, for the *puthujjana*, an **instance** or **particular** of the **general** that he perceives—'my self'. This 'my self' is, **for him**, the most supreme or the most important level of generality. In the notion 'this (is) my self' each set of five-holding-aggregates represents the 'this' which is the particular, and each set is **different** from the other. This means that the particular—i.e. the 'this'—

1. *Anguttaranikāya I, Tikanipāta, Cūlavagga, Sutta No. 7.*



**changes**, and furthermore, whenever this change is perceived it is perceived as discontinuous. We agree that from the common sense point of view it is odd to consider the man as 'growing old discontinuously', yet the fact is that neither the man himself nor anyone else perceives the man growing old continuously. But whilst the particular—i.e. the 'this'—is seen to change, the general—i.e. the 'my self'—is seen to **remain the same**, is seen as **persisting unchanged**, as **standing**. And so in the passage of time there is manifest in 'this (is) my self' the third characteristic of **changing whilst standing** (*thitassa aññathattam*). At this level of generality the first characteristic manifest—i.e. the characteristic of arising (*uppāda*)—would be birth, and the second characteristic manifest—i.e. the characteristic of passing away (*vaya*)—would be death. So that, from the time 'my self' **was born** up to the time 'my self' **will die**, there is a **changing whilst standing**.

Quite clearly, the third characteristic of 'changing whilst standing' leaves no room for the notion of continuous change or flux. But again we may be asked why **we** cannot leave this notion alone, why we are so keen to do away with it. We certainly can leave it alone were it not for the fact that, as we pointed out earlier, it has become a chief source of misinterpretation of the Buddha's Teaching. In the context of science, for instance, we indicate no keenness to eliminate it, nor do we have anything to say against science itself in its proper place. But the proper place for science is not the Buddha's Teaching. Scientific thinking and the kind of thinking required by the Buddha's Teaching are of two quite different orders. When it comes to the Buddha's Teaching it is very necessary to eliminate this notion of continuous change or flux; for the Buddha's Teaching deals with personal experience, and the notion of continuous change or flux as applied to personal experience is a self-contradiction. If change has anything meaningful to do with my existence (or my personal experience), then I must be conscious of it, I must perceive it; and whenever I perceive change, I perceive it as discontinuous. (It is all the fashion nowadays to make the Buddha's Teaching scientific.



Writers who suffer from this complex love to come up with the following idea: 'The Buddha discovered that *anicca dukkha anattā*—impermanent, unpleasurable, not-self—are the three basic attributes of all sentient life and of the material world as well.' Utter misunderstanding of the Buddha's *anicca-dukkha-anattā* is thus indicated. *Dukkha* (unpleasurable) and *anattā* (not-self) do not in anyway apply to material things; nor do they, for that matter, as we shall see in the next Chapter, apply to the arahat who is also a sentient individual.)

Why then, if it is false, is this doctrine of continuous change or flux taught in the context of the Buddha's Teaching? The answer is: because it provides a conveniently simple interpretation of the Suttas, easily learned and easily preached. The Buddha has said; "What is impermanent, that is unpleasurable; what is unpleasurable, that is not-self" *yadaniccaṃ tam dukkhaṃ, yaṃ dukkhaṃ tad anattā*.<sup>1</sup> This is understood (or rather, misunderstood) in the following way. Impermanence is taken to mean continuous change or flux, and if this notion is correct, the idea of a thing's self-identity cannot be maintained, for what **appears** to be the selfsame table persisting in time is not **really** the same table since it is continuously changing. In consequence of this the idea of self (*attā*) is an illusion, and it persists only on account of nescience (*avijjā*), or on account of the ignorance of the truth of universal flux. If now we remove this ignorance we shall see that what we formerly took to be the persisting (or existing) selfsame table really has no abiding self-identity at all, that it does not **really** exist, and likewise, with regard to the individual too, there **really** is no individual existing. And this explains why the Buddha said that what is impermanent is not-self. But then what is wrong with this explanation? What is wrong with it is—as we pointed out in Chapter II—it does **not** explain why what is impermanent is **unpleasurable** (or suffering). *Dukkha* (unpleasurableness, suffering) is the key to the whole of the Buddha's Teaching. And, again as we said in Chapter II, any interpretation that leaves *dukkha*

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1. *Samyuttanikāya III, Khandhasamyutta, Aniccavagga, Sutta No. 4.*



out of account (or adds it, perhaps, only as an afterthought) is at once suspect. The point is, *dukkha* has nothing to do with the table's self-identity or supposed lack of self-identity; what it **does** have to do with is '(my) self' as **subject**, which is quite another matter. But this is a very much more difficult thing to grasp than the misinterpretation based on the notion of flux; so flux gets the popular vote. This misinterpretation of *anattā* as simply lack of self-identity is of Mahayanist origin. In fact, in one of their texts—the *Prajñapāramitā*—it is specifically stated that it is only on account of *avijjā* (nescience) that things **appear** to exist, whereas in **reality** nothing exists.<sup>1</sup> But the fact is that even when *avijjā* is completely destroyed (as in the case of the arahat) the table continues to have a self-identity; that is to say, it continues to exist as the **same** table (though undergoing changes at subordinate levels—fading polish, edges getting rounded, etc.) until such time as it is destroyed or falls apart. But for the arahat, as we shall see in the next Chapter, it is no longer a table 'for me', since, by the utter destruction of *avijjā*, all notions of 'I', 'mine' and 'self' have ceased in him.

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1. This is also why those who adopt *anicca* to mean 'continuously changing' or 'in a state of flux' come to the erroneous conclusion that on the important teachings of the Buddha, Theravada and Mahayana are in agreement. In spite of all that religious demagogues and scholars may have to say about it, Mahayana is **not** the Buddha's Teaching.



## CHAPTER X

### WHAT IS IMPERMANENT THAT IS UNPLEASURABLE WHAT IS UNPLEASURABLE THAT IS NOT-SELF

With this we come to the heart of the Buddha's Teaching.

Since the Buddha's Teaching is aimed at destroying all possibility of **mental** unpleasant feeling and not bodily feeling (pleasant or otherwise), it is to be expected that the accent all along would be on mental feeling. By definition, pleasant mental feeling is pleasure, and unpleasant mental feeling is unpleasure. A bodily feeling, whether pleasant or otherwise, can **give** pleasure or unpleasure depending upon its significance at the given time, just as much as a perception can give pleasure or unpleasure depending upon its significance. Neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling is pleasurable when known and unpleasurable when not known.

The Buddha says: "Matter..... feeling..... perception..... determinations..... consciousness, monks, is impermanent. What is impermanent that is unpleasurable; what is unpleasurable, that is not-self. What is not-self, that (should be seen as): 'Not, this is mine; not, this am I; not, this is my self.' Thus should it be seen as it really is by right understanding."<sup>1</sup>

Now, the simple fact that we get pleasure and not unpleasure in seeing that an unpleasant bodily feeling is impermanent should indicate to us that the Buddha's "what is impermanent, that is unpleasurable" (yad aniccam tam dukkham) is something very much more subtle than it would appear to be.

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1. Rūpam . . . vedanā . . . saññā . . . sankhārā . . . viññānaṃ bhikkhave aniccaṃ. Yad aniccaṃ tam dukkhaṃ, yaṃ dukkhaṃ tad anattā. Yad anattā tam na etaṃ mama na eso ahaṃ asmi na me so attā ti. Evaṃ etaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammappaṇṇaya datthabbaṃ. (Samyuttanikāya III, Khandhasamyutta, Aniccavagga, Sutta No. 4)



The Buddha further says: "There are, monk, these three feelings stated by me: pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling, and neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling. These three feelings have been stated by me. But this indeed, monk (also) has been stated by me: 'Whatever is felt, that counts, as unpleasurableness (suffering)'. That however, monk, was said by me in connection with the impermanence of determinations."<sup>1</sup>

That means to say **all** feeling is **not** unpleasant; whilst there is unpleasant feeling that is felt as unpleasant, there **is** feeling that is pleasant and is therefore **felt** as pleasant. Nevertheless, **whatever** kind of feeling it be, it **counts as** or is **reckoned as** or is **concerned with** unpleasurableness. And this, the Buddha tells us, is because of the impermanence of the determinations that determine the feeling. Now, since the determinations that determine the feeling are impermanent, the feeling that is so determined is necessarily impermanent. "Whatever cause, whatever condition there be for the arising of matter..... feeling..... perception..... determinations..... consciousness, that is impermanent. How monks, can, consciousness that is originated from impermanent things be permanent?"<sup>2</sup> Therefore, **any** feeling is said to **count as** unpleasurableness **because it is impermanent**.

But, to the puthujjana, however intelligent he be, this declaration of the Buddha is rather a revolutionary one. The puthujjana finds himself faced with a serious difficulty here,

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1. Tisso ima bhikku vedanā vutta mayā: sukha vedanā dukkha vedanā adukkhamasukkha vedanā. Ima tisso vedanā vutta mayā. Vuttaṃ kho pana etaṃ bhikkhu mayā: yaṃ kinci vedayitaṃ taṃ dukkhasmin ti. Taṃ kho pana etaṃ bhikkhu mayā sankhāraṇaṃ yeva aniccaṃ sandhaya bhāsitaṃ. (Saṃyuttanikāya IV, Vedanāsaṃyutta, Rahogatavagga, Sutta No. 1).
  2. Yo pi hetu yo pi paccayo rupassa....vedanāya....saññāya....sankhāraṇaṃ....viññānassa uppādāya so pi anicco. Aniccasambhūtaṃ bhikkhave viññānaṃ kuto niccaṃ bhavissati? (Saṃyuttanikāya III, Khandhasaṃyutta, Aniccavagga, Sutta No. 7).



WHAT IS IMPERMANENT THAT IS UNPLEASURABLE  
WHAT IS UNPLEASURABLE THAT IS NOT-SELF

and he might even conclude that the Buddha is adopting an unreasonable and pessimistic attitude towards things.

The first remark that must be made in this connection is that the puthujjana **ought** to find himself confronted with a difficulty when he considers the Buddha's Teaching.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this is quite simply that when the puthujjana **does** come to understand the Buddha's Teaching he thereby **ceases** to be a puthujjana. The second remark is that the puthujjana must caution himself before coming to such conclusions, for the reason that the view that any feeling counts as unpleasurableness is, the Buddha points out, a view that is derived from **right understanding** and **seeing things as they really are**. When things are derived from right understanding and seeing things as they really are, neither pessimism nor optimism has **any place**.

Now, impermanence is something that one can do nothing about. Whether one likes it or not, impermanence remains. It is a characteristic that **is** there irrespective of **whatever** one does. "Whether, monks, there be an arising of Tathagatas (Buddhas) or no arising of Tathagatas, this element, this basis of things, this order of things prevails: all determinations are impermanent."<sup>2</sup> This impermanence **by itself** is neither a question of pleasure nor a question of unpleasure. Pleasure and unpleasure are a question of (mental) feeling. What then is this unpleasurableness that is tied up with impermanence, or, what is this all-pervading dukkha (unpleasurableness) that the Buddha is speaking of?

Before attempting to answer this question we should remember that our answer should indicate or directly imply what the **arising** of dukkha is, what the **ceasing** of dukkha is, and what

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1. See p. for the Buddha's remark to Vacchagotta on this matter.

2. Uppādā vā bhikkhave Tathāgatānaṃ anuppādā vā Tathāgatānaṃ thitāva sādhatu dhammatthitatā dhammaniyāmatā: sabbe sankhārā aniccā ti. (Anguttaranikāya I, Tikanipāta, Yodhājivavagga, Sutta No. 4).



the **path** leading to the ceasing of dukkha is, since the Buddha has said that he who sees dukkha also sees its arising, its ceasing, and the path leading to its ceasing. In fact he says that he who sees any one of these four truths sees the other three also. "Monks, who sees dukkha, sees the arising of dukkha, sees the ceasing of dukkha, sees the path leading to the ceasing of dukkha. Who seeth the arising of dukkha, sees dukkha, sees the ceasing of dukkha, sees the path leading to the ceasing of dukkha. Who seeth the ceasing of dukkha, sees dukkha, sees the arising of dukkha, sees the path leading to the ceasing of dukkha. Who seeth the path leading to the ceasing of dukkha, sees dukkha, sees the arising of dukkha, sees the ceasing of dukkha."<sup>1</sup> Thus, to understand dukkha is to understand the Buddha's Teaching.

There is yet another matter to be remembered in attempting to answer this question. That is: the Buddha said his Teaching is also the Teaching of dependent-arising (*patticcasamuppada*). "He who sees dependent-arising sees the Teaching; he who sees the Teaching sees dependent-arising."<sup>2</sup> That means our answer to what dukkha is, or our understanding of "what is impermanent, that is unpleasurable; what is unpleasurable, that is not-self" should incorporate dependent-arising, at least in principle; and this principle of dependent-arising is: "When

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1. Yo bhikkhave dukkham passati dukkhasamudayaṃ pi so passati dukkha nirodhaṃ pi passati dukkhanirodhagāminīpatipadaṃ pi passati. Yo dukkha samudayaṃ passati dukkham pi so passati dukkhanirodhaṃ pi passati dukkha nirodhagāminīpatipadaṃ pi passati. Yo dukkhanirodhaṃ passati dukkham pi so passati dukkhasamudayaṃ pi passati dukkhanirodhagāminīpatipadaṃ pi passati. Yo dukkhanirodhagāminīpatipadaṃ passati dukkham pi so passati dukkhasamudayaṃ pi passati dukkhanirodhaṃ pi passati. (Samyuttanikāya V, Saccasamyutta, Kotigāma-vagga, Sutta No. 10)
  2. Yo patticcasamuppādaṃ passati so dhammaṃ passati; yo dhammaṃ passati so paticcasamuppādaṃ passati. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 28).



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there is this, that is; with the arising of this, that arises. When there is not this, that is not; with the ceasing of this, that ceases.”<sup>1</sup>

So, that, our understanding the Buddha’s “what is impermanent, that is unpleasurable; what is unpleasurable, that is not-self” is a matter of understanding the essence of the Buddha’s Teaching. If this is **not** seen and understood, then no amount of analysis of the five aggregates however detailed and brilliant it be, no amount of mystic hair-splitting theories regarding a self, no amount of theorizing on things like kamma and rebirth—no amount of such pedantic engagement will help the puthujjana to solve the problem of his own existence. Of that he can be **certain**. It also tells us how and why those individuals who saw this ceased to be puthujjana without any resort to scholarly analysis or theorizing.

We said that subjectivity is tied up inseparably with the perceptions of permanence and pleasurable-ness. If one of these three fall the other two also fall along with it.

Let us then consider a subjective experience, i.e. an experience incorporating subjectivity. Very summarily it would be: the presence of a thing taken as (my) self, which, for the sake of clarity, we can re-write as: the presence of a thing-taken-as-(my)-self. And the **thing** that is taken as (my) self is always an experience conceived as ‘I’ and ‘mine’; in other words, it is an experience incorporating the conceivings of subjectivity indicated in the root-structure. Since the thing-taken-as-(my)-self **is** ‘(my) self’, we can describe the experience even more summarily as: the presence of ‘(my) self’.

Now, this experience lasts **only for so long as** the perception of pleasurable-ness is present in its structure. But the perception of pleasurable-ness is there **only for so long as** ‘(my) self’

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1. Imasmiñ sati idaṃ hoti, imassa uppāda idaṃ uppajjati. Imasmiñ asati idaṃ na hoti, imassa nirodha idaṃ nirujjhati. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 115).



is perceived as **permanent**. That means, the perception of permanence must also be present in the structure of the experience. Therefore if '(my) self'—which is the thing-taken-as-(my)-self, no more, no less—is to be pleasurable it must **not** be **seen** as subject to passing away. That which is most repugnant to '(my) self' is the apprehension of its passing away. How can that which 'I **am** or is '(my) self' be seen as pleasurable if it is seen to pass away, be non-existent sooner or later? Now, when it is seen that '(my) self'—which is nothing but the thing-taken-as-(my)-self—is impermanent, then this '(my) self' is also seen as unpleasurableness. That means to say, the experience (which is the presence of a thing-taken-as-(my)-self is then **seen** as just a case of **unpleasurableness**. But this perception of unpleasurableness is at the expense of the perception of pleasurableness. Consequently, all those things which cannot exist without the perception of pleasurableness get adversely effected. What are those things? They are first and foremost the considerations of 'I', 'mine' and 'self'. The result, then, is that the experience gets modified in structure, and now becomes an experience wherein the reflexive aspect is **opposite** to what it was. From a case of the thing being 'I', 'mine' and 'self' the experience becomes a case of the thing being 'not I', 'not mine' and 'not self'. If we use the terminology of the Suttas, the triad 'This is mine; this am I; this is my self' gets replaced by 'Not, this is mine; not, this am I; not, this is my self' (na etam mama, na eso aham asmi, na eso me atta)<sup>1</sup>. The holding thus gets

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1. Na etam mama is usually translated as "This is not mine". But this rendering tends to leave in the reader the impression that though **this** is not 'mine' there may be something **else** that is 'mine'. In fact such an impression is deliberately made to remain in the reader's mind when, for instance, na eso me atta is rendered by certain scholars as "this is not the Self of me"—as if to say that **this** is not 'my self', but something else is. (See page 115 of The Book of The Kindred Sayings III.) Such situations have to be avoided. "Not, this is mine" (which is a rendering by Ñānavīra Thera) may not sound as pleasing as "This is not mine". But accuracy in meaning is more important than readability.

The same comments apply to the other two sentences in the triad.



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adversely effected at **all** levels when the perception of pleasurable-ness vanishes. It is like removing the binding material that holds a graded structure. When this material is removed the whole structure collapses all in one heap. Or, it is like banging the top of a structure wherein each layer is intimately bound to the lower one. The bang effects the entire structure right down to the bottom.

The position then is: when whatever-is-taken-as-(my)-self is seen as impermanent, it is also seen as unpleasurable and not-self. And **that** is the meaning of "What is impermanent, that is unpleasurable; what is unpleasurable, that is not-self." In this statement, "what" (yam) is **always** what-is-taken-as-(my)-self. That means, it is not just the immediate experience; it is the immediate experience together with the reflexive component wherein subjectivity is involved. And it is precisely **because** it is taken as (my) self that it is necessary to see it as not-self. If indeed it is **not** taken as (my) self what is the necessity to see it as not-self? And, the root-structure of the puthujjana's reflexive experience indicate that, for the puthujjana, in his reflexive experience, the thing is always a thing conceived as 'I' and 'mine', and therefore, it is always at least incipiently, a thing-taken-as-(my)-self. The puthujjana, not seeing impermanence, falsely sees experience as pleasurable **by** taking it to be 'I', 'mine' and 'self'; the noble disciple (i.e. the sekha), seeing impermanence, rightly sees experience as unpleasurable **when** taken to be 'I', 'mine' and 'self'.

Now, we said that the thing-taken-as-(my)-self is '(my)self'. But this '(my) self' is always the five-holding-aggregates-taken-as-(my)-self, the five-holding-aggregates being the thing itself. (It hardly matters whether the entire five-holding-aggregates or a single holding-aggregate is taken as (my) self.) Now, if it is seen that the five-holding-aggregates-taken-as-(my)-self are impermanent, then the five-holding-aggregates-taken-as-(my)-self are also seen as unpleasurable, and of course as not-self.



But the five-holding-aggregates-taken-as-(my)-self **are** impermanent, and to see them as impermanent is **to see rightly** (sammadasso). That means, **if one rightly sees**, then one will see that the five-holding-aggregates-taken-as-(my)-self are unpleasurable.

All that we have done in the above is to replace our earlier thing' by 'five-holding-aggregate'. And our saying that in the puthujjana's experience the thing is always the thing-taken-as-(my)-self, is nothing but a saying that in the puthujjana's experience the five-holding-aggregates are always the five-holding-aggregates-taken-as-(my)-self. But, as we pointed out in Chapter VII, the five-holding-aggregates are **always**, at least incipiently, the five-holding-aggregates-taken-as-(my)-self. Therefore it is said: "In short, the five-holding aggregates are unpleasurable"—*Sankhittena pancupādānakkhandhā dukkhā*.<sup>1</sup> And that is the first noble truth.

It should be clearly understood that when it is said that experience (i.e. the five-holding-aggregates) is seen **as** unpleasurableness, what is referred to is not a pessimistic **attitude** towards experience. No. By it is meant that experience is quite definitely seen to **be** unpleasurableness, to **be** unworthiness, to **be** something that had better not be.

As before, when the five-holding-aggregates-taken-as-(my)-self are seen to be unpleasurableness the perception of pleasurableness vanishes, and with that, the holding vanishes. The experience which was the five aggregates taken to be 'I', 'mine' and 'self' now becomes the five aggregates considered to be 'not mine', 'not I' and 'not (my) self'.

In the above we have three progressive levels of experience indicated: (1) the immediate experience; (2) the immediate experience conceived as 'I' and 'mine' (for 'I'), which corresponds to the reflexive experience (always incorporating the

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1. Mahāvagga I, Pancavaggiyakathā, Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta.



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immediate experience) at its more or less involuntary level; (3) the immediate experience considered to be 'I', 'mine' and 'self', which corresponds to the reflexive experience at the level of reflexion (or self-observation). The attempt to see rightly is made at this level of reflexion; in fact it is an attempt at **right** reflexion, which, as we said in Chapter III is an attempt at right mindfulness-and-awareness (*satisampajanna*).

It is of the **utmost** importance to note that what is described as unpleasurableness is the five-holding-aggregates (*pancupādānakkhandha*)—i.e. the five aggregates with holding (*sa-upādāna*)—and **not** just the five aggregates (i.e. not the five aggregates without holding (*anupāda*)). The reason is simply that it is the five-holding-aggregates that are taken as self implicitly or explicitly, and not the five-aggregates. The fundamental holding which is there with the conceivings indicated in the root-structure—i.e. the *maññāna* of the *mūlapariyāya*—**must** be present. If there are only the five-aggregates **without** the conceiving 'I'—without *maññāna*—there can be no consideration whatever of self, not even a possibility. Such is really the case with the arahat, and **only** with the arahat, as we shall see later on. And that is precisely why though the arahat sees his experience to be impermanent he does **not** see it as unpleasurable.<sup>1</sup> One must be quite clear on this point; it is the five-holding-aggregates that are unpleasurable and not the five-aggregates without holding.

Upon occasion, however, the puthujjana regards (not sees or understands) a pleasing perception to be unpleasurable by seeing its impermanence, as when he says of the external object concerned, "It is not worthy, for it will pass away soon." Here too it is really 'my self' that he finds unpleasurable by seeing its impermanence, and the perception (of the external object) is that which, at the time, is 'my self'. But he is quite unaware of what is really happening, has no understanding

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1. See pages      for further discussion of this.



about it, and further without any effort on his part he immediately finds something else—which may be even the very **regarding**—to be permanent, by taking it as (my) self.

Apart from the more difficult task of acquiring the direct vision and understanding that all experience—subjective experience of course—is impermanent, unpleasurable and not-self, the reason why the puthujjana, for a start, finds it difficult to agree with it even intellectually, even to acquiesce with it, is that he always tends to the **deliberate view** that there is an 'I' standing separate and apart from experience, and which in his reflexion he sees as (my) self. He does not see that 'I' is, at any given time, for him, the experience itself, or a part of it; that, in other words, 'I' is a **descriptive endowment** on the immediate experience, a conceit (*māna*), a mental superstructure he tacitly **imposes** on the experience. Not seeing this, he withdraws 'I' as it were, from the experience, treats it as something independent of the experience and standing apart from it,—i.e. as a self—, and so lets the existential ambiguity rear its ugly head. He must therefore try to stop this 'withdrawal' and see that apart from the experience there is no 'I'. (Apart from the assemblage of parts, there is no 'chariot'.)

"Where, friend, there is no feeling at all, can you indeed there say: ' (I) am'?"

"No, Lord."<sup>1</sup>

Another reason why the puthujjana cannot agree that his experience at all times is dukkha is because he thinks of dukkha purely in terms of **manifest** unpleasure, such as anxiety, sorrow, despair, etc. The identification of experience as 'self' need not immediately—that is to say, need not simultaneously with the identification, bring about manifest unpleasure. The

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1. Yattha pana āvuso sabbaso vedayitam natthi, api nu kho tattia asmith siyati?

No hétam bhante. (Dīghanikāya, Sutta No. 15)



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unpleasure manifests in time sooner or later. But to the extent that unpleasure is **pregnant** or the condition for unpleasure to be manifest in time is already planted, to that extent the experience is dukkha. It is as if a man has accepted a false coin as a true one. The betrayal will be manifest only when he proceeds to purchase something with it and then he finds he cannot get it accepted. But the possession of the false coin **with the belief that it is a true coin** is still a betrayal, or, is a possession pregnant with manifest betrayal. (this smile is rather a crude one no doubt, but it serves to indicate what is meant.) “And how, monks, is there anxiety from holding? Here, monks, the uninstructed puthujjana regards matter..... feeling..... perception..... determinations..... consciousness thus: ‘This is mine; this am I; this is my self’. That consciousness of his changes, becomes different. To him, consciousness changing and becoming different, sorrow, lamentation, unpleasure, grief and despair arise.”<sup>1</sup>

It is useful to determine just how what the Buddha points out is applicable to the holding-aggregate of feeling, for the reason that suffering (or unpleasurableness) is first and foremost a matter of feeling. The puthujjana may think: “My self is feeling; my self is not in fact feeling, my self is devoid of feeling; my self is not in fact feeling, nor is my self devoid of feeling, my self feels, to feel is the nature of my self.”<sup>2</sup>

Now, in whatever manner the puthujjana may identify feeling (which would always be feeling conceived as ‘I’ and

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I. Katam ca bhikkhave upādā-paritassanā hoti? Idha bhikkhave assutavā puthujjano rūpam.....vedanam.....saññam.....sankhāre.....viññānam etam mama eso aham asmi eso me attā ti samanupassati. Tassa tam viññānam viparināmati aññathā hoti. Tassa viññānaviparināmaññathā-bhāvā uppajanti sokaparidevadukkhadomanssupāysnā.

(Saṃyuttanikāya III, Khandasamyutta, Nakulapitavagga, Sutta No.8.).

2. Vedanā me attā ti; na h’eva kho me vedanā attā; appatisamvedano me attā ti; na h’eva kho me vedanā attā, no pi appatisamvedano me attā, attā me vediyati, vedanā-dhammo hi me attā ti. (Dīghanikāya, Sutta No, 15)



'mine') with 'self', if he finds that this 'my self', now identified with feeling in some way or other, is impermanent, he will find it as unpleasurable and not-self. And this situation applies whether the feeling that is identified is itself **felt** as pleasant or unpleasant. Therefore the Buddha says: "Whatever is felt, that counts as unpleasurableness. That, however, monk, was said by me in connection with the impermanence of the determinations." In this way, **all** feeling at least **counts as** unpleasurableness.

It should be noted that in the statement "Whatever is felt, that counts as unpleasurableness" the word 'unpleasurableness' is used as a noun, and as a noun, it is equated to 'whatever is felt', which is really to feeling, since it is only feeling that is felt. But it is equally right for us to say that whatever is felt, counts as unpleasurable, in which case the word 'unpleasurable' is used by us as an adjective to describe 'whatever is felt'. What is being pointed at is the same in either case; in one case we are saying **what** 'whatever is felt' is, in the other case we are **describing** 'whatever is felt'. (The word *dukkhasmin* which comes here means "counts as unpleasurableness" or "reckoned as unpleasurableness". It is really the locative case of the neuter noun *dukkha*, and it is used in order to embrace in its orbit **all** feeling, whether that feeling be felt as pleasant or otherwise.) In fact the same situation applies to the statement "The five-holding-aggregates are unpleasurable". It is equally right for us to say that the five-holding-aggregates are unpleasurableness.<sup>1</sup> (The word *dukkha* in the sentence—*pañcupādanakkhandhādukkh*—is however an adjective describing the *pañcupādanakkhandha*.)

When the *puthujjana* feels pleasure he plainly perceives it as pleasurable, and his craving-for-'being' dominates making him remain identifying 'self' with the immediate experience or with the immediate and reflexive experience. When he feels unpleasure he does not identify 'self' with the immediate experience; his craving-for-'unbeing' then dominates and makes

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See footnote 1 on page. 174.



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him identify 'self' with only his reflexive experience which is **perceiving** pleasurableness in the **intentions** at the time. At such a time there is an **anticipation** of **feeling** pleasure. So that even when he **feels** unpleasure he **perceives** pleasurable-ness. Thus, felt unpleasurableness at a coarse level does not exclude (false) perception of pleasurableness at a fine (or subtle or implicit) level. In fact, felt unpleasurableness **requires** (false) perception of pleasurableness. In this way, whether the puthujjana feels pleasure or not he always perceives pleasurableness. If he cannot feel pleasure he must at least **perceive** pleasurableness. And indeed he does, because he always perceives 'I' and 'self', and these are perceived as pleasurable because impermanence is not seen.

The puthujjana is first and foremost after feeling and perceiving pleasure. But this pleasurableness (or pleasure) he perceives is **always** something that, in his reflexive experience, is in association with the false perception of a permanent subject which he refers to as 'I' and 'my self'. It is the root-structure of his experience. And this root-structure is the ready-made means (the fait accompli) within which he constantly finds the perception of pleasurableness.

With the noble disciple (not the arahat) who sees impermanence the position is just the reverse. When he feels unpleasure he perceives unpleasurableness; and when he feels pleasure also he perceives unpleasurableness (provided of course his perception of impermanence is brought into play): So that, in the right-view of the noble disciple the puthujjana is, in his reflexive experience, always perceiving false pleasurableness, false permanence, and false selfness (or selfhood)

It should be noted that one kind of feeling cannot be **felt** as another kind. Thus, a pleasant bodily feeling cannot be felt as unpleasant. But it can give pleasure or unpleasure (which are mental) depending upon its significance at the time. Likewise, a mental pleasant feeling, i.e. a pleasure, cannot be felt as unpleasure. In fact when one kind of feeling is felt the other kinds are not felt. "Ānanda, at a time when



one feels a pleasant feeling, at that time one does not feel an unpleasant feeling, one does not feel a neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling; one feels only a pleasant feeling at that time. Ānanda, at a time when one feels an unpleasant feeling, at that time one does not feel a pleasant feeling, one does not feel a neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling; one feels only an unpleasant feeling at that time. Ānanda, at a time when one feels a neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling, at that time one does not feel a pleasant feeling, one does not feel an unpleasant feeling; one feels only a neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling at that time."<sup>1</sup> Thus the Buddha does not say that a pleasant feeling is to be felt as unpleasant; he says: "Pleasant feeling is viewed as unpleasurable."<sup>2</sup>

We can now see the all-important significance of the following passage that occurs so often in the Suttas:

"What think you, monks, is matter..... feeling..... perception..... determinations..... consciousness permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, Lord."

"What is impermanent, is that pleasurable or unpleasurable?"

"Unpleasurable, Lord."

"What is impermanent, is unpleasurable, is of the nature to change, is it proper to regard that as: 'This is mine; this am I; this is my self'?"

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1. Yasmim Ānanda samaye sukhaṃ vedanaṃ vedeti neva tasmim samaye dukkhaṃ vedanaṃ vedeti, na adukkhamasukkhaṃ vedanaṃ vedeti sukhaṃ yeva tasmim samaye vedanaṃ vedeti. Yasmim Ānanda samaye dukkhaṃ vedanaṃ vedeti neva tasmim samaye sukhaṃ vedanaṃ vedeti, na adukkhamasukkhaṃ vedanaṃ vedeti, dukkhaṃ yeva tasmim samaye vedanaṃ vedeti. Yasmim Ānanda samaye adukkhamasukkhaṃ vedanaṃ vedeti neva tasmim samaye sukhaṃ vedanaṃ vedeti, na dukkhaṃ vedanaṃ vedeti, adukkhamasukkhaṃ yeva tasmim samaye vedanaṃ vedeti (Dīghanikāya, Sutta No. 15).

2. Sukha vedanā dukkhato dittha hoti. (Itivuttaka, Tikanipāta, athama vagga, Sutta No. 4)



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“No, Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

We may point out that unless the meaning of this passage is seen **in one's own experience**, even if it is read a million times nothing will come out of it. Perhaps one of the difficulties for the reader today is that the passage is so very terse. In the earlier part of the passage important things are implied, not explicitly stated. But these important things implied and not explicitly stated in the earlier part of the passage are indicated in the latter part; the earlier part is only to indicate the validity of this ethically imperative latter part. In the Buddha's day the listeners seem to have been well aware of what the implications were—the subjective aroma that hangs all around it. Today, there is the rationalism of our rationalists and the lofty equanimity of our scholars to contend with; consequently we have become all too objective in our thinking. So it takes some effort on our part to break away from it all and get down to some self-observation and private thinking on our own.

If we rewrite this passage including within brackets the things implied, it would be as follows:

“What think you, monks, is matter..... feeling..... perception..... determinations..... consciousness (you take as I, mine and self) impermanent or permanent?”

“Impermanent, Lord.”

“(If) what (you take as I, mine and self) is impermanent, is that (then) pleasurable or unpleasurable?”

“Unpleasurable, Lord.”

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1. Taṃ kiṃ maññata bhikkhave, rūpam....vedanā....saññā....sankhārā  
....viññānaṃ niccaṃ vā aniccaṃ vā?

Aniccaṃ bhante.

Yaṃ pana aniccaṃ dukkhaṃ va taṃ sukhaṃ vāti?

Dukkhaṃ bhante.

Yaṃ pana aniccaṃ dukkhaṃ viparināmadhammaṃ kallaṃ nu taṃ samānupassitum: etaṃ mama eso ahaṃ asmi eso me attā ti?

No heṭaṃ bhante.

(Samyuttanikāya III, Khandhasamyutta, Khajjanīyavagga, Sutta No. 7).



"What is impermanent, is unpleasurable, is of the nature to change, is it proper to regard that as: 'This is mine; this am I; this is my self'?"

"No, Lord."

The puthujjana takes all things related to him as truly I, mine and self, and so considers them to be permanent and pleasurable. Thereby he does not see them as unpleasurable. Thus he does not see the first noble truth; and that means he does not see the Buddha's Teaching. He may, as the scientist or the philosopher does, see enough of objective impermanence. But he does not see **subjective** impermanence.

Seeing subjective impermanence does not mean seeing only the impermanence of the thing that is in subjection; that is held. In other words, it does not mean seeing merely the immediate experience to be impermanent. The entire experience (immediate and reflexive) has to be seen as impermanent. That means the **taking-as-(my)-self** **also** has to be seen as impermanent; and that means the **latent tendency** (*ānusaya*) to 'I' and 'mine' has to be seen as impermanent, as **utterly destructible**, since all considerations of self result from this tendency. This latter part however is not as easy a thing to do as it might appear to be, for the reason that what is so subtly and implicitly 'my self' and hence tacitly assumed to be permanent, is the desire-and-lust (*chandarāga*) in the five-holding-aggregates. In fact the puthujjana who has not heard the Buddha's Teaching is of the firm view that desire-and-lust is not something that can be destroyed, but is something that can only be **suppressed**; the implication is that the tendency to desire-and-lust is permanent-and quite naturally too this implication, for it is this very desire-and lust that is his 'my self' fundamentally, and 'my self' is always a permanent thing for him. (In Chapter IV we pointed out that desire-and-lust (*chandarāga*) is the considering of the perceiving pleasurable-ness in 'being' as 'I' and 'mine'.) All this means that it is necessary to see that the holding at **all** levels is also impermanent, can be brought to an end once and for all, just as the things held can be.



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But to see that holding—at all levels—is impermanent, it is necessary to see that holding is determined by determinations that are impermanent. “Here, monks, the uninstructed puthujjana, unseeing of the nobles, ignorant of the noble Teaching, undisciplined in the noble Teaching, unseeing, of the good men, ignorant of the good men’s Teaching, undisciplined in the good men’s Teaching, regards matter (feeling..... perception..... determinations..... consciousness) as self (self as being material, and so on). This regarding, monks, is a determination. This determination, how does it result, how does it arise, how is it born, how is it produced? In the uninstructed puthujjana, monks, contacted by feeling born of nescience-contact, arises craving. Thence is born that determination. Thus, monks, that determination is impermanent, determined, dependently-arisen. That craving is impermanent, determined, dependently-arisen. That feeling is impermanent, determined, dependently-arisen. That contact is impermanent, determined, dependently-arisen. That nescience is impermanent, determined, dependently-arisen.”<sup>1</sup> It is precisely because the impermanence of the holding (*upādāna*) is **included** in the impermanence (*aniccatā*) taught by the Buddha that we find the impermanence taught by the Buddha to be something so very subtle and equally difficult

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1. Idha bhikkhave assutavā puthujjano ariyānaṃ adassāvī ariyadhammassa akovido ariyadhamme avinīto sappurisānaṃ adassavī sappurisadhammassa akovido sappurisadhamme avintī rūpaṃ/ vedanaṃ....saññaṃ.... sankhāre....viññānaṃ/ attato/ rūpavantaṃ attānaṃ, and so on/ samanupassati. Yā kho pana bhikkhave sā samanupassanā sankhāro so. So pana sankhāro kimnidāno kimsamudayo kimjātiko kimpabhavoti? Avijjāsamphassajena bhikkhave vedayitena phutthassa assutavato puthujanassa uppannā tanhā. Tatojo so sankhāra. Iti kho bhikkhave so pi kho sankhāro anicco sankhato paticcasamuppanno; sā pi tanhā aniccā sankhatā paticcasamuppannā; sā pi vedanā aniccā sankhatā paticcasamuppannā; so pi phasso anicco sankhato paticcasamuppanno; sa pi avijjā aniccā sankhatā paticcasamuppannā; (Samyuttanikaya III, Khandhasamyutta, Khajjanīyavagga, Sutt No. 9).



to see. This Sutta tells us that holding—which is what, in the Sutta, has been referred to as the regarding of things as self in one way or another is finally dependent upon nescience (*avijjā*). This nescience is of course the nescience regarding the four noble truths. Therefore, to see that holding is impermanent we have to see that this nescience, upon which the holding depends, is itself impermanent; in other words, we have to see the passing away of this nescience. But the passing away of this nescience is seen only by the **Knowledge** of the four noble truths. (Knowledge is the destruction or passing away of nescience.) And, Knowledge of the four noble truths is, quite simply the knowledge of the Buddha's Teaching. In this way we find that the impermanence taught by the Buddha is not simply the objective impermanence. If it is just this impermanence, then no Buddha is necessary; a philosopher or a scientist would do. The impermanence taught by the Buddha embraces both the objective **and** the subjective. And subjective impermanence, which is the more difficult one to see, is seen **only** when the Buddha's Teaching—i.e. the four noble truths—is seen. This should make it quite clear that the impermanence (*aniccatā*) taught by the Buddha is seen **only** by him who sees the four noble truths, and **not** any other. It should further be clear that **this** impermanence which **stands and falls together** with *dukkha* and *anatta* is found **only** in the Buddha's Teaching. Consequently, all beliefs or views that impermanence (*aniccatā*) and suffering (*dukkha*) were well recognized in ancient Indian philosophies and have never been peculiar to the Buddha's Teaching, are sadly mistaken. The impermanence and suffering that are to be found outside the Buddha's Teaching are very limited in scope, and are confined to puthujjana thinking. They have very little indeed to do with the Buddha's doctrine of impermanence and suffering which are **beyond** puthujjana thinking. One must be very clear on this point. Seeing the Buddha's impermanence is **not** merely a seeing that the **things** regarded as 'I', 'mine' and 'self' are impermanent, are utterly destructible. It is **also** the seeing that the **regarding** (*samanupassanā*) of those things as 'I', 'mine' and 'self' is



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impermanent, is utterly destructible. It requires no Buddha to show the former impermanence. But it **does** require a Buddha to show the latter.

Now, as we have indicated, when that which is considered as self is seen to be impermanent, it is then seen as unpleasurable also. What consequently happens is that the perception of pleasurable-ness that is associated with the considering it as self vanishes; when this perception vanishes the considering of it as self also vanishes, since the consideration of it as self lasts only for so long as the perception of pleasurable-ness is associated with it. If we take the case of the holding-aggregate of feeling, for instance the position would be as the Suttas tell us: "Friend, there are these three feelings. What three? Pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling and neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling. These three feelings, friend, are impermanent. When it is seen that what is impermanent, that is unpleasurable whatever desire there is for feeling, that does not stand."<sup>1</sup> The desire for feeling (*vedanāsu nandi*) is the consideration of the perception of pleasurable-ness in feelings as self; and this perception of pleasurable-ness could be in feeling that is now present (as when pleasant feeling is being felt) or in feeling that is anticipated (as when unpleasant feeling is being felt). (Neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling is pleasurable in its knowledge and unpleasurable in its non-knowledge).

Any particular experience is a particular set of five-holding-aggregates. And the immediate purpose behind seeing any set of five-holding-aggregates as unpleasurable is to strike at, stultify, the perception of pleasurable-ness which—as indicated in the *Mūlapariyāya Sutta*—is there at the root-structure. It is not the **felt** pleasure in manifestly pleasant experience or the felt unpleasure in manifestly unpleasant experience that

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1. Tisso kho ima avuso vedana. Katama tisso? Sukha vedana dukkha vedana adukkhamasukha vedana. Ima kho avuso tisso vedana anicca, Yad aniccam tam dukkham ti veditam ya vedanasu nandi sa na upatthasiti. (*Samyuttanikaya II, Abhisamayamutta, Kalarakhatiyavagga, Sutta No. 2*).



is aimed at here; it is the subtle **perception** of pleasurableness **in all experiences** felt pleasurable and unpleasurable that is aimed at. "He thus possessed of devotion and opposition, whatever feeling he feels, whether pleasant, unpleasant or neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant, he delights in that feeling, greets it, stands, attached to it. To him delighting in that feeling, greeting it, standing attached to it, desire is born. What desire there is for feeling, that is holding. To him, with holding as condition, there is 'being'."<sup>1</sup> The difficulty in comprehending this Sutta passage lies in relation to unpleasant feeling. What is meant—in the case of experiencing an unpleasant feeling—is not that he perceives pleasurableness (i.e. delights) in the feeling itself, or that he sees the unpleasant feeling itself as pleasurable, but that there is the perception of pleasurableness in that experience of which the unpleasant feeling is only a **part**. The perception of pleasurableness involved is in the consideration of the experience—more particularly, the reflexive consciousness in the experience—as self; and the consideration as self is always there whether the experience is comprised of pleasant feeling or unpleasant feeling or neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling. But this is not all. The **degree** of pleasurableness perceived is **increased** by the **anticipation** of experience that is **devoid** of the unpleasant feeling. In other words, there is also an anticipation of a better experience. And upon this anticipation depends desire; and desire is the identification of the perception of the anticipated (higher) pleasurableness with 'self'; and this in turn means continuing to be a 'self', that is to say, 'being' is maintained. When this perception of pleasurableness (delight) is struck at, the holding to this perception of pleasurableness (the desire,—*nandi*—which is the holding here) is struck at; and consequently, experience no longer **re-**

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1. So evaṃ anurodhavirodhaṃ samapāṇno yaṃ kinci vedanaṃ vedeti sukhaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā adukkhamasukhaṃ vā, so taṃ vedanaṃ abhinandati abhivadati ajjhosāya titthati. Tassa taṃ vedanaṃ abhinandato abhivadata ajjhosāya titthato uppajjati nandī. Yā vedanāsu nandī tad upādānaṃ. Tassa upādāna-paccayā bhavo. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 38).



**mains identified as 'I', 'mine' and 'self'.** In this way, 'I am' or 'being' or 'existence' is struck at and stultified. If we use Pali terms it would be; when *abhinandana* is struck at, *nandi* is struck at; when *nandi* is struck at, *bhava* is struck at; when *bhava* is struck at, fear, anxiety, worry, etc. are also struck at, since these unpleasurable things can be there **only** in *bhava*.

Be it noted that perceiving experience as unpleasurable does not make the individual **feel** unpleasure; it only attenuates the **perceiving** pleasurableness. This attenuation tends to detachment from experience, to being 'cold' (*sīta*) towards experience, which only means that it tends to attenuate the holding, and at all levels. And this attenuating holding in turn attenuates feeling pleasure (such as joy) and unpleasure (such as anxiety) in experience. So that whatever unpleasure there is now felt or will be felt as time goes on will thin out. And what develops instead is a **relief** from 'being' (*bhava*) which is experienced as a being (pleasantly) at ease,<sup>1</sup> or is felt as "the cankerless pleasant feeling" (*ānāsavā sukha vedanā*)<sup>2</sup>. "And how, monks, is there no anxiety from no holding? Here, monks, the instructed noble disciple regards matter.....feeling.....perception.....determinations.....consciousness thus: 'Not, this is mine; not, this am I; not, this is my self.' That consciousness of his changes, becomes different. To him, consciousness changing and becoming different, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair do not arise. Thus indeed, monks, is there no anxiety from no holding."<sup>3</sup> Finally, in this way, the per-

1. This ease is also referred to in the Suttas by the word *sukha*. In the Majjhimanikāya, Sutta 86, it is called the "ease of relief" (*Vimuttisukha*). See pages ..... on the usage of the word *sukha*.
2. Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 101.
3. Katam ca bhikkhave anupādā aparitassanā hoti? Idha bhikkhave sutavā ariyasāvako rūpam....vedanam....saññam....sankhārā....viññānam na etam mama na eso aham asmi na eso me attā ti samanupassati. Tassa tam viññānam viparināmati aññathā hoti. Tassa viññānaviparināmaññathābhāvā nuppajjanti sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā. Evaṃ kho bhikkhave anupādā aparitassanā hoti ti. (Samyuttanikāya III, Khandhasaṃyutta, Nakulapitavagga, Sutta No. 8).



ception of impermanence leads to the destruction of the conceit '(I) am' and consequently of all unpleasure. "In one who perceives impermanence, Meghiya, perception of not-self becomes steady; one who perceives not-self reaches the removal of the conceit '(I) am' and extinction here and now."<sup>1</sup>

The attenuation or destruction of holding (*upādāna*) attenuates or destroys the feelings of **both** pleasure and unpleasure. The reason for it is that, as we pointed out earlier, feelings of pleasure and unpleasure pertain to 'being' (*bhava*), and 'being' is dependent upon holding.

"What is impermanent, is unpleasureable, is of the nature to change,—could internal (or, one's own) pleasure and unpleasure arise without holding that?"

"No, lord".<sup>2</sup>

The reader who is familiar with the Mahayana and Zen teachings might be tempted to think that unpleasurableness and not-selfness (*dukkhatā and anattatā*) are devices (*upāya*) or koans devised by the Buddha in order to achieve a certain end. Such a view is undoubtedly wrong, for the reason that the perception of impermanence—with which are inseparably tied up the perceptions of unpleasurableness and not-selfness—is a matter of **seeing rightly** and nothing else. If one adheres to the view that an upaya or koan is involved here, quite clearly, one **cannot** come by these perceptions.

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1. Aniccasannino Meghiya anattasaññā santhati, anattasanni asmimāna samugghatam papunati, dittheva dhammenibbānaṃ ti. (Udāna, Meghiyavagga, Sutta No. 1).

2. Yam panāniccam dukkhaṃ viparināmadhammaṃ api nu taṃ anupādāya uppajjeyya ajjhataṃ sukhadukkhanti.

No hetam bhante.

(Samyuttanikāya III, Khandasamyutta, Ditthivagga, Sutta No. 1).



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In the Suttas we get the following triad:

- (a) “All determinations are impermanent” (*sabbe sankhārā aniccā*)
- (b) “All determinations are unpleasurable” (*sabbe sankhārā dukkhā*)
- (c) “All things are not-self” (*sabbe dhammā anattā*).<sup>1</sup>

But why this particular form? This is the question to which this triad immediately points. In other words, without telling us that all things (*dhammā*) are impermanent and unpleasurable—in the same way we are told that all things are not-self—why does the Buddha take us out of our way to tell us that all **things which determine other things** (*sankhāra*) are impermanent and unpleasurable?

The answer is simply that the Buddha is not giving an **explanation** or a **description** of things, but a Teaching with the help of which holding to belief in self (*attavādupādāna*) can be got rid of. And when one comes to understand this triad, one will see that if the triad is to help achieve that which is expected, it **has** to be in this particular form.

Let us then examine how this triad leads on to giving up holding to belief in self.

The puthujjana takes the five-holding-aggregates to be self in one way or another. The five-holding-aggregates-taken-as-(my) -self is ‘my self’ Now ‘my self’ is always taken to be permanent. If ‘my self’ is seen to be impermanent ‘my self’ will not last. But since in the puthujjana’s experience it **is** seen as permanent, the puthujjana thinks that whatever else is impermanent, this ‘my self’ is permanent, or at least that whatever is essentially ‘my self’ is permanent. So that, if the puthujjana is to see that ‘my self’ is impermanent, indirect methods are necessary. Therefore the Buddha makes

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1. Anguttaranikāya I, Tikanipāta, Yodhājivavga, Sutta No. 4.



him see that 'my self' is dependent upon some **other** thing (within the structure of this 'my self') that is impermanent. when he sees this position—i.e. that 'my self' is dependent upon a determination that is impermanent—he sees that 'my self' is **necessarily** impermanent; or that 'my self' is **structurally** impermanent. When he sees that 'my self' is impermanent, he sees that 'my self' is a deception. In other words, he then sees that this 'my self' was only something that he had created by falsely taking a thing (i.e. a particular set of five-holding-aggregates) that is really not-self to be self; he now sees the **thing** (i.e. the particular set of five-holding-aggregates) as not-self. Thus when the determination (*sankhāra*) is seen to be impermanent (*anicca*), the thing (*dhamma*) is seen as impermanent, and **therefore** as not-self. Now if he sees that **all** (*sabbe*) determinations are impermanent, he will see that **all** things are not-self. In this way, "All determinations are impermanent" (*sabbe sankhārā aniccā*) leads to "All things are not-self" (*sabbe dhammā anattā*).

Two matters we have to note in the above are:

- (1) The thing (*dhamma*) is **always** a thing that is explicitly taken as (my) self or potentially to be taken as (my) self; it is a determined thing (*sankhata dhamma*) as against a 'determination' (*sankhāra*); In other words it is the five-holding-aggregates (*pañcupādānakkhandha*.)
- (2) All things are seen as not-self **by seeing** that all things are impermanent **by seeing** that all determinations (that determine those things) are impermanent. This is the indirectness in the method, the leading-on (*opāyika*) aspect of it.

In precisely the same way when it is seen that all determinations are unpleasurable, it is seen that all things are unpleasurable; and when it is seen that all things are unpleasurable, it is seen that all things are not-self. Thus, "All determinations are unpleasurable" (*sabbe sankhārā dukkhā*) leads to "All things are not-self."



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The above indicates that the *dyad* regarding determinations (*sankhāra*) leads to seeing that all things are impermanent and unpleasurable, and since anything that is impermanent and unpleasurable is also not-self, this *dyad* leads to **all things** being impermanent, unpleasurable and not-self. In Pali terms, the *dyad* leads to **all things** being *anicca-dukkha-anattā*

It is important to note that this dyad regarding determinations does not provide us with some positivistic approach involving deduction. In other words, it does not mean that *anattā* is logically deduced from *dukkha* or from *anicca* or from both *dukkha* and *anicca*. There is neither a temporal or logical precedence in seeing *anicca-dukkha-anattā*. What precedence there is strictly 'leading on' (*opanāyika*), — leads on to **seeing** (*anicca-dukkha-anattā*) not to deducing. These three things are inseparable, in that—and only in that—if a thing which is taken as self, either explicitly or implicitly, **is** seen as *anicca* (as *dukkha*, as *anattā*), it is at one and the same time seen as *dukkha* and *anattā* (as *anicca* and *anattā*, as *anicca* and *dukkha*) also. The precedence involved is one that the Buddha has **designed** in order to lead the individual on to seeing them. But **when**—repeat, **when**—one of the three is seen, then all **three** are seen. Quite clearly, when this happens holding to belief in self-i.e. *attavādupādāna* — vanishes. And with that the coarse 'person - view' (*sakkāyaditthi*) which depends upon this (*attavādupādāna*) also vanishes. The *sakkāyaditthi* that has gone off in the *sekha* who sees *anicca-dukkha-anattā* would then be the gross forms—the deliberate viewing as self that is dependent upon his deliberate belief in self, from which the *puthujjana* has no escape. This matter will be dealt with further in a latter Chapter.

Further, seeing "All determinations are impermanent" is also seeing its tacit corollary "All (determined) things are impermanent", and seeing "All determinations are unpleasurable" is also seeing its tacit corollary "All (determined) things are unpleasurable". And this again means when any one of the three in the triad "All determinations are impermanent,



all determinations are unpleasurable, all things are not-self" is seen, not only are all the three in the triad seen, but also that all things are impermanent and unpleasurable; briefly, that all things are *anicca-dukkha-anattā*. This is so because the thing (*dhamma*) is always a thing that is taken as (my) self or is potentially a thing that is taken as (my) self, in other words, a particular set of five-holding-aggregates. If this point is remembered then it will become clear why there can only be a **together**-seeing of these three things *anicca-dukkha-anattā* or no seeing at all. The popular view that only the anatta of the triad *anicca-dukkha-anattā* is peculiar to the Buddha's Teaching (and not the *anicca* and the *dukkha* in it) is most certainly wrong. **All three** in this triad are peculiar to the Buddha's Teaching.

One might wonder why it is not said, "All determinations are not-self", why the description of the determinations is limited to impermanent unpleasurable. The reason is simply that such a statement **cannot** lead on. When a thing (*dhamma*) is considered as self (*attā*) its determinations (*sankhāra*) are not considered at all. At that time the determinations may be seen but not **identified** or **considered** as determinations. The reason for it is simple: if the determinations **are** considered at that time, then the thing would **not** be considered as self, since the consideration as self requires acceptance of the thing as being permanent (*nicca*) and therefore as not dependent upon determinations, as not determined. Thus it is **necessary** that the determinations be considered if it is to lead on to seeing that the thing is not-self. If it is said that "All determinations are not-self", then the other two statements in the triad will have to be. "All determinations that determine the determinations are impermanent; all determinations that determine the determinations are unpleasurable". And then we might as well call the determinations of the statement "All determinations are not-self" (determined) things. In which case we would get the triad: "All things are not-self; all determinations that determine the things are impermanent; all determinations that determine the things are unpleasurable." And that is



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precisely the same as the triad: "All things are not self; all determinations are impermanent; all determinations are unpleasurable." So that if we are to see that things are not-self there is no way out other than adhering to the triad as given in the Suttas.

One other thing. It is sometimes thought, and often too, that one can come to see that all things are *anicca-dukkha-anattā* by seeking **evidence** of experience being *anicca-dukkha-anattā*, or in other words, by examining things around—i.e. various experiences — as evidence of *anicca-dukkha-anattā*. The view appears to be: we should see (or at least try to see) **this** thing as *anicca-dukkha-anattā*, then we should see **that** thing as *anicca-dukkha-anattā*, and so on; and when in this manner we go on accumulating evidence (the more, the better) that things are *anicca-dukkha-anattā*, we shall eventually come to see (or be really able to see) that **all** things are *anicca-dukkha-anatta*.

But this way can end only in shipwreck. Perhaps an analogy will help to explain why.

Suppose a man is informed that 'All circles are not-square', and fails to find that this is necessarily so. This man might decide to test the validity of this statement in one of two possible ways. He may in the first place decide to go out and examine circles and see if any of them are square, and if he were to succeed, he would thereby disprove the contention 'All circles are not-square'. Or he may examine circle after circle, and, finding no square circles he would become more and more convinced that **most probably** all circles are not-square. And however much evidence he collects to the effect that circles are not-square, yet the only conclusion he can come to is still **most probably** all circles are not-square'. If however he is to know for certain that all circles **are** not-square, then he has to see with direct vision that it is a **structural necessity** for all circles **to be** not-square; that the idea of circularity is incompatible with the idea of squareness; that it is the **nature** of a circle to be round and not square. In the same way it will be fruitless



to collect evidence that all things are *anicca-dukkha-anattā*. What is more, it is no problem at all to **consider** any particular thing as *anicca-dukkha-anattā*. The puthujjana is every bit as fully equipped as the noble disciple to consider any particular thing (i.e. any experience) as *anicca-dukkha-anattā*. What he is **not** equipped for is to **see** that a thing is *anicca-dukkha-anatta*, and consequently to see that **all** things are *anicca-dukkha-anattā*; and this is not because the noble disciple can see everything whilst the puthujjana cannot, but because the noble disciple can see the **structure** or the **nature** by which all things **have** to be *anicca-dukkha-anattā*, and the puthujjana **cannot**. When the puthujjana considers a thing as *anicca-dukkha-anatta*, all it means is that—without his necessarily being aware of it—he is taking something **else** (which 'something else' may even be the very considering that thing as *anicca-dukkha-anattā*) as being *nicca-sukha-attā* (permanent, pleasurable and self). To go about seeking for **evidence** for *anicca-dukkha-anatta*, then, does not lead to seeing *anicca-dukkha-anattā*; it is an endless task; or, if it has an end, it ends in shipwreck. Rather what one needs to do to see *anicca-dukkha-anattā* is to try to reach the noble disciple's viewpoint, which means not finding evidence but seeing **structure**; and for this all one needs is **one** thing, **one** experience, and to examine it as an example of **all** experience, and to see that *anicca-dukkha-anattā* is a **structural necessity**, that the thing cannot be otherwise. This also explains how certain individuals saw *anicca-dukkha-anattā* at the very first instance the Buddha pointed it out to them. They saw that their experience is structurally so. It is certainly not suggested that one should not examine various experiences in order to see their underlying structure, but rather that one should take them as **examples** more than as evidence. (Alas! in modern scientific days all the emphasis is placed on the idea of evidence. So we are overburdened with hypotheses and with conclusions 'beyond reasonable doubt'.) In other words, it is not a matter of accumulating evidence that particular things are *anicca-dukkha-anattā*—which presents **no** difficulty at all—; it is to try and **see** or **understand** that not only is a particular thing *anicca-*



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*dukkha-anattā*, but that it is in the **nature** of the thing to be *anicca-dukkha-anattā*, that its being *anicca-dukkha-anattā* is not merely gratuitous, but is necessary. It is the necessity of the fact, rather than the fact itself, that is so difficult to see.

It must also be remembered that seeing *anicca-dukkha-anattā* is not merely a seeing that **if** a thing is *anicca* it is necessarily *dukkha* and *anattā*. In other words, it is not sufficient to see the **principle** underlying *anicca-dukkha-anattā*. It is also necessary to see that **all** things **are** *anicca*. Only when this too is seen does one see **all** things to be *anicca-dukkha-anattā*. Then only does one really have the three perceptions—the perception of impermanence, the perception of unpleasurableness, and the perception of not-selfness. In Pāli, these perceptions are termed *aniccasaññā*, *dukkhasaññā* and *anattasaññā* respectively.

But to see that all things are *anicca* one must see that the *upādāna* — i.e. the holding—is, is at all levels, *anicca*. For this, as we pointed out earlier, one must see the passing away or the destruction of the determination upon which this holding finally depends. That means one must see the passing away of nescience regarding the four noble truths. In other words, one must achieve **knowledge** of the four noble truths. This knowledge—which nevertheless is not the fully developed knowledge of the arahat—is there only in the *sotāpanna* and the higher *sekhas* (noble disciples). (There are two categories of *sekhas* who, as between themselves, are at the same level, but below the level of the *sotāpanna*).

The Suttas make it quite clear that the *puthujjana* does not actually see *anicca-dukkha-anattā*. This may sound dogmatic to the *puthujjana* and affronting to his intellectual dignity. Nevertheless it is so. And for him to realize that it is so he has to develop the perception of impermanence — *aniccasaññā* — himself. In other words, for him to see that he has no perception of impermanence he has to develop the perception of impermanence himself. But when he develops this perception



he is no more a *puthujjana*; which only means that as a *puthujjana* he did not see that **he did not see**. The *puthujjana* remains a *puthujjana* because he does not see that he is *puthujjana*. That is why if he is to **cease** being a *puthujjana* he must place that initial **trust** in the Buddha when the Buddha tells him that he does not see that he does not see, and advises him to follow his Teaching so that he will eventually come to see this state of affairs.

That the *puthujjana* does **not** see *aniccatā* (impermanence) is evident from the fact that the formula 'Whatsoever has the nature of arising, all that has the nature of ceasing', which is clearly enough a definition of *aniccatā*, is used only in connection with the *sotāppanna's* attainment: "(To him) there arose the eye-of-the-Teaching, clear and unconstrained: 'Whatsoever has the nature of arising, all that has the nature of ceasing'."<sup>1</sup> *Aniccatā* is seen with the *sotāppanna's* eye-of-the-Teaching—the *dhammacakkhu*. This eye-of-the-Teaching (or eye-of-the-nature-of-things) is not just an eye (*cakkhu*), nor is it just the Teaching (*Dhamma*). It is **the** eye that can and does see the Teaching. (An eye is meant to see; if it does not see it is not an eye.) It is precisely because of the absence of this eye that there are doubts about the validity of the Teaching, more particularly about the efficacy of the **path** to the cessation of *dukkha*. And further, what is this **whatsoever** (*yam kinci*) that is referred to in the formula 'Whatsoever has the nature of arising, all that has the nature of ceasing'? It is matter, it is feeling, it is perception, it is determinations, and it is consciousness, **together with holding**. In short, it is the five-holding-aggregates, the *pañcupādānakkhandha*.

The same comments apply in the matter of seeing that all things are unpleasurable (*dukkha*). When all things are seen to depend upon an unpleasurable determination, then they will be seen as unpleasurable. "Whatever cause, whatever condition

1. Virajam vitamalam dhammacakkum udapādi: yam kinci samudaya-dhammam sabbam tam nirodhadhammam ti. (Mahāvagga I, Pañcavaggiyakathā, Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta).



there be for the arising of matter.....feeling.....perception  
.....determinations.....consciousness, that is unpleasur-  
able. How, monks, can consciousness that is originated from  
unpleasurable things be pleasurable?"<sup>1</sup> If however the four  
noble truths are seen, then it **will** be seen that all things  
ultimately **do** depend upon an unpleasurable determination.  
This determination is nescience regarding the four noble truths;  
and nescience—whether it is regarding the four noble truths  
or anything else that concerns **me** is always unpleasurable  
whenever it is seen. "All determinations are unpleasurable"  
(*sabbe sankhārā dukkhā*) means that all things that determine  
'(my) self' are unpleasurable. And what are these things?  
As our Sutta passage on pages 100-101 says, they are nescience  
*avijjā*, craving (*tanhā*), consideration as self (*attato samanupas-*  
*sanā*), etc. These things are seen to be unpleasurable **only**  
**when** they are seen to be things that determine '(my) self'  
that is to say, when they are seen to be the determinations that  
determine a **false** (my) self.

Now, it should be clear from what has gone before that with the arising of *aniccasaññā*, *dukkhasaññā* and *anattasaññā* also arise. Inasmuch as the *puthujjana's* (false) perception of permanence, pleasurableness and selfness are inseparable, the noble disciple's perception of impermanence, unpleasurableness and not-selfness are inseparable. To have one perception is to have the other two also. And if in experience attention is deliberately focussed on one, attention gets focussed on the other two implicitly. We may note that in the practice of right-mindfulness indicated in the Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 118, there is mention of mindfulness being established on seeing impermanence (*aniccanupassī*) but not on seeing the other two.

1. Yo pi hetu yo pipaccayo rūpassa....vedanāya....saññāya....sankhā  
rānam....viññānassa uppādāya so pi dukkha. Dukkhasambhūtaṃ  
bhikkhaveviññānaṃ buto sukham bhavissati. (Saṃyuttanikāya III,  
Khandhasamyutta, Aniccavagga, Sutta No. 8).



The impermanence which the Buddha teaches is essentially a subjective impermanence. To see impermanence in the objective is not a difficult matter. This objective (or rational, or speculative) impermanence is something relatively coarse, and in the development of *aniccasaññā*, it is first eliminated. Thereafter, one gradually reduces the mixed objective-subjective memories or thoughts of past and future impermanence. Finally, one is wholly concentrated on the perception of impermanence in one's **present** experience; and this is purely subjective. It is clear from the Suttas that in the perception of impermanence attention is withdrawn from the objective, and then is focussed completely on the subjective; i.e. on the five-holding-aggregates, on their passing away. See for example *Samyuttanikāya IV, Salāyatanaśamyutta Lokakamagunavagga, Sutta No 8*. The fact is that the triad *anicca-dukkha-anattā* has no intelligible application if applied **objectively** to things.

All that has been said so far regarding *anicca-dukkha-anattā* can be very briefly stated as follows:—

It is the nature of the five-holding-aggregates to press for recognition as permanent and pleasurable (my) self. In the absence of knowledge of the four noble truths, there is no possibility of withstanding this pressure; and consequently, they are falsely taken as permanent and pleasurable (my) self, thus becoming just a matter of unpleasurableness (*dukkha*). But when there is knowledge of the four noble truths, this pressure can be withstood and the five-holding-aggregates can be seen as what in truth they are—impermanent, unpleasurable and not-self. And when they are thoroughly understood (*parināma*) 'I', 'mine' and '(my) self' are cut off leaving only the five-aggregates behind, which is the experience of the end of unpleasurableness.

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We can now proceed to a further examination of *dukkha*, and also examine briefly how the word *dukkha* is used in the Suttas. (In chapter V, whilst, discussing feeling, we did give some indication of how this word is used.)



In the Suttas we have the following said about *dukkha* (as a noun) :

“*Dukkha, dukkha*, it is said, friend *Sāriputta*. But what indeed, friend, is *dukkha*?”

“Friend, there are these three unpleasurablenesses: the unpleasurableness of unpleasure, the unpleasurableness of determinations, and the unpleasurableness of change. These indeed, friend, are the three unpleasurablenesses.”<sup>1</sup>

This Sutta therefore indicates that the phenomenon referred to by the word *dukkha* concerns three kinds of unpleasurablenesses (*dukkhatā*). So that, if a rendering in English is necessary, we can render *dukkha* as ‘unpleasurableness’: Another rendering we may employ would be ‘suffering’. No doubt neither of these two words indicate precisely the meaning of *dukkha*. For that matter in no language other than Pāli can there be found a **precise** equivalent of *dukkha*—an equivalent that carries with it **all** the implications; and the reason for it is simply that outside the Buddha’s Teaching there is **no** *anicca-dukkha-anattā*—at least not what the Buddha means by them.

The first type of unpleasurableness (*dukkhatā*) mentioned in our Sutta is the unpleasurableness of **felt** unpleasure., i. e. of worry, fear, anxiety, sorrow, grief, doubt, etc. This type is felt, and in a crude way, can be perceived as unpleasurable by the *puthujjana*. The third type is also an unpleasurableness of felt unpleasure, but only in relation to the unpleasure that comes about when things—particularly pleasurable things—change or undergo transformation. As in the case of the first, this type is also felt, in a crude way, and can be perceived as unpleasurable by the *puthujjana*. The second type is the unpleasurableness of determinations: “all determinations are unpleasurable.” This type is perceived **only** by him who has *dukkhasaññā*. In the Pali it is referred to as *sankhāraduk-*

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1. *Dukkham dukkhanti āvuso Sāriputta vuccati. Katamam nu kho āvuso dukkhanti? Tisso imāvuso dukkhata: dukkhadukkhata sankhāradukkhata viparināmadukkhata. Ima kho āvuso dukkhata ti. (Samyuttanikāya IV, Jambukhadakasamyutta, Sutta No. 14).*



*khatā*. And it is the *dukkha* we quoted on page 152: "Whatever is felt, that counts as *dukkha*. That however, monk, was said by me only in connection with the impermanence of determinations." Thus it covers **all** situations.

So that, **to the one who rightly sees**, any experience, whether felt unpleasurable or not, is perceived as unpleasurable because it is determination-unpleasurable.

(Neither-unpleasurable-nor-pleasurable feeling would be pleasurable when known and unpleasurable when not known.) Therefore, the word *dukkha* in its **broadest** sense, covers experience at **all** times.

This means that, given certain conditions, the perception **not** the feeling) of unpleasurableness (*dukkhasaññā*) **is common** to **all** experience. And what are these conditions? They are the perception of impermanence (*aniccasaññā*) and the perception of not-self (*anattasaññā*). Thus to him who perceives *dukkha* in its broadest sense—i.e. to him who has *dukkhasaññā* (which means he then has *aniccasaññā* and *anattasaññā* also)—the *puthujjana*'s experience is a *dukkha* **from top to bottom, from beginning to end**. One must be quite clear on this point: experience is at **all** times *dukkha* **only to him who has** *dukkhasaññā*; for unless there is *dukkhasaññā* he cannot perceive the all-embracing determination-unpleasurableness (*sankhāradukkhatā*) though he can in some crude way or other perceive the other unpleasurablenesses when they occur without his having *dukkhasaññā*. It is precisely because the first noble truth tells us that the five-holding-aggregates are *dukkha* **in the broadest sense** that the first noble truth, and therewith the Buddha's Teaching, is not seen by the *puthujjana*.

Now, with regard to the usage of the word *dukkha*, we find that the word *dukkha* is used in the Suttas in varying context. Obviously it is very necessary to have a clear picture of its varied usage. When used as an adjective *dukkha* means **unpleasant** or **painful** or **unpleasurable**, (in this book, as we said in Chapter V, the words 'unpleasant' and 'pleasant'



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and painful' are used by us in connection with **both** the bodily and the mental; but the words 'pleasurable', 'pleasurableness', 'unpleasurable' and 'unpleasurableness' are used by us in connection with the mental **only**.) *Dukkha*, as a noun, is used in two senses. In the first sense it is limited to unpleasant mental feeling, i. e. to feelings of worry, fear, anxiety, etc., which are always **felt** as unpleasurable. Since unpleasant mental feeling is always felt as unpleasurable, unpleasant mental feeling is also referred to as unpleasure. In this sense, therefore, (the noun) *dukkha* means **unpleasure**. In the second sense, *dukkha* (as a noun) covers a field that is more than this pure and simple felt unpleasure. In this second sense it refers to the five-holding-aggregates or to experience at any given time. Hence the word *dukkhasaññā* also refers to the perception of *dukkha* in **this** second sense, which is also the broadest sense. And the importance of the use of the word *dukkha* in this second sense lies in its applicability to the five-holding-aggregates at **all** times. The first noble truth tells us that the phenomenon called the five-holding-aggregates is actually and in truth at **all** times just this phenomenon of *dukkha*. One of the chief reasons why the individual finds himself puzzled with the first noble truth is that he imagines it to mean that the five-holding-aggregates are *dukkha* in the first sense of pure and simple **felt** unpleasure. He thus puts himself into a position wherein he just cannot agree with the Buddha, and consequently turns away from the Teaching. After all, he **feels** pleasure as well as unpleasure. So that the five-holding-aggregates are not a matter of **felt** unpleasure at all times; and the Buddha confirms this when he says that when one kind of feeling is there the other kinds are not there. But if the individual is given the impression that the first noble truth is saying something different and certainly more subtle—or that *dukkha* does not refer merely to this plain and simple felt unpleasure—he may at least **try** to understand it and so pursue the Teaching.



Often we find the word *dukkha* used as a noun in both senses in one and the same Sutta; and this can cause confusion if one does not understand the distinction. The situation particularly arises in those passages where the word *dukkha* is made one word in the multi-compound word *sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā* and then is again used in the immediately following sentences in its all-embracing sense (i.e. in the sense of the sum total of the three unpleasurablenesses). For example we get: *Jātipaccayā jarāmaranam sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā sambhavanti. Evametassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa pamudayo hoti.*<sup>1</sup> These two sentences translated into English would be: "With birth as condition, age-ing-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, unpleasure, grief and despair come into being. Thus is the arising of this whole aggregate of *dukkha*." The word *dukkha* in the multicomponent word *sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupayasa* means unpleasure; and the **particular** unpleasure referred to by the word *dukkha* in this multi-compound word is, as explained in the *Dighanikāya*, Sutta No. 22, the unpleasure due to body (*kāyika*); in other words, the unpleasant mental (not bodily) feeling due to some body condition. So that, if necessary, this multi-compound word can be rendered as: "sorrow, lamentation, unpleasure (due to one's own body), grief and despair." Now, the word *dukkha* in the sentence that follows refers to *dukkha* in its all-embracing sense as when saying, "The five-holding-aggregates are *dukkha*".

Henceforth it is necessary that we use the word *dukkha* indicating the context in which it is used. Therefore, from here onwards, whenever we use the word *dukkha* we shall be using it **only** as a noun in the second sense indicated above, i. e. as the sum total of the three unpleasurableness. If we use it in any other sense we shall provide an indication.

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The *puthujjana* does not see impermanence as applicable to **himself**; and therefore not as applicable **fully and-all**

1. Samyuttanikāya II, Abhisamayasamyutta, Buddhavagga, Sutta No. 1.



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**embracively.** At any given time he assumes, implicitly of course, that that which is his 'self' at the time is not passing away, is undying; and he perceives pleasurable-ness therein. In this way, the *puthujjana* finds pleasure (or pleasurable-ness) by **deceiving** himself. He falls for the deception 'self'. He accepts it at its face value. When the concept of self arises and something is 'self', he does not react against it; and so he permits 'self' to survive. Or, what **appears** to him as self he takes to be actually self, so that there is always a **false self for him**, which is his 'my self'. All this happens very tacitly, with hardly any deliberate effort needed by him. It is the very **mode** (*pariyāya*) of his 'being'. The *puthujjana* lives, essentially means, he is doing this: falling for the deception 'self', or taking 'self' at its face value.

But we may ask the question: if the *puthujjana* perceives pleasurable-ness and actually derives pleasure, does it matter that he does so by taking impermanent things to be permanent? The answer to that is: certainly not, **if impermanence does not catch up and unpleasure manifest itself.**

"And how, monks, is there anxiety (or anguish) from holding? Here, monks, the uninstructed *puthujjana* regards matter..... feeling..... perception..... determinations..... consciousness thus: 'this is mine; this am I; this is my self.' That consciousness of his changes, becomes different. To him consciousness changing and becoming different, sorrow, lamentation, unpleasure, grief, and despair arise. Thus indeed, monks, is there anxiety from holding."<sup>1</sup>

As the *puthujjana* gets old and death approaches, the unpleasure (anxiety, worry, fear, etc.) becomes more and more

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1. Katam ca bhikkhave upādā paritassanā hoti? Idha bhikkhave assutavā puthujjano rūpaṃ....vedanaṃ....saññaṃ.....sandkāraṃ.... viññānaṃ etaṃ mama eso aham asmi eso me attā ti samanupassati. Tassa taṃ viññānaṃ viparināmati aññathā hoti. Tassa viññānaviparināmaññathabhavā uppajjanti sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyassa. Evaṃ kho bhikkhave upādā paritassanā hoti. (Samyuttanikāya III, Khandhasamyutta, Nakulapitavagga, Sutta No. 8).



manifest, more and more prevalent and acute. And imminent death becomes the acutest because it brings to him the apprehension of the **complete** disappearance of that which all along he **implicitly** thought to be not disappearing—'myself'. The *puthujjana's* deriving pleasure by taking things as actually self would be a wise thing **if** there is **no** old age and death. In such a situation the Buddha's Teaching has no place, and in fact no Buddha can arise. "Monks, were three things not to be found in the world, a *Tathāgata* would not arise in the world, an arahat fully enlightened; nor would a Teaching and Discipline proclaimed by a *Tathāgata* shine in the world. What three? Birth, ageing and death."<sup>1</sup>

The *puthujjana's* nature is to perceive impermanent things (and all things are impermanent) as pleasurable (*sukha*) and as permanent (*nicca*). He is a "perceiver of permanence in the impermanent" (*anicce niccasaññi*)<sup>2</sup> and a "perceiver of pleasurableness in the unpleasurable" (*dukkhe sukhasaññi*);<sup>3</sup> and he perceives things as pleasurable and permanent **because** he takes them as self (*atta*). The Buddha flatly contradicts him, and says; **if** you **rightly** see things, i.e. if you see things—which are the five-holding-aggregates—as impermanent (*anicca*), you will then see them as unpleasurable (*dukkha*) and as not-self (*anatta*). Consequently, all holding to beliefs or view regarding self (*attavādupādāna*) will cease, and the right-view (*sammāditthi*) will supervene that what arises is *dukkha*, what persists is *dukkha*, and what ceases is *dukkha*.

Accordingly, we find the following dialogue between Māra the Evil One and Vajirā the nun:

**"Māra the Evil One:**

By whom is the creature formed? Who is the creature's maker?  
Who is the arisen creature? Who is the creature that ceases?

1. Tayo bhikkhave dhammā loke na samvijjeyyūṃ na Tathāgato loke upajjeyya araham sammāsambuddho na Tathāgatappavedito dhamma-vinayo loke dippeyya. Katame tayo? Jāti ca jarā ca maraṇaṇca. (Anguttaranikāya V, Dasakanipāta, Akankhavagga, Sutta No. 6).
2. Anguttaranikaya II, Catukkanipata, Rohitassavagga, Sutta No. 9.
3. Ibid.



**Vajirā the nun:**

Why did you refer to 'the creature', Māra, are you involved in (wrong) view?

This is a pile of pure determinations; there is here no 'creature' to be found.

Just as for an assemblage of parts there is the term 'a chariot'.

So, when there are the aggregates, convention says 'a creature'.

It is merely *dukkha* that comes into being, *dukkha* that stands and disappears.

Nothing apart from *dukkha* comes into being, nothing other than *dukkha* ceases."<sup>1</sup>

The answer that the nun Vajirā gives is the answer that the one who has *aniccasaññā*, *dukkhasaññā* and *anattasaññā* gives, and likewise it is rightly understood only by the one who has *aniccasaññā*, *dukkhasaññā* and *anattasaññā*. The *puthujjana* misunderstand it. He misunderstands it thus:

He learns that the Buddha has said that "both self and what belongs to self actually and in truth are not to be found". Therefore, if he is to fall in line with this declaration of the Buddha, he thinks he must abolish self. But he cannot conceive the individual other than in terms of a self; to him individuality and selfhood are the same thing. So, in order to abolish self he

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**1. Mārā papima:**

Kenāyaṃ pakato satto. kuvaṃ sattassa kāraṇaṃ, Kuvaṃ satto samuppanno,  
kuvaṃ satto nirujjhatī ti?

**Vajirā bhikkuni:**

Kin nu satto ti pacesi, Māra ditthigataṃ nu te?  
Saddhasankhārapunjo'yaṃ nayidha sattupalabbhati;  
Yathā hi angasambhārā hoti saddo ratho iti,  
Evaṃ khandhesu santesu hoti satto ti sammuti.  
Dukkhaṃ eva hi sambhoti, dukkhaṃ titthati veti ca,  
Nāññatra dukkhā sambhoti, nāññatra dukkhā nirujjhatī ti.  
(Samyuttanikāya I, Bhikkhunisaṃyutta, Bhikkhunīvagga, Sutta No. 10).



abolishes the individual. And he abolishes the individual by saying (as in some of the exegetical books of the Pāli Canon) that 'in the highest sense (*paramatthato*) there is no individual, there is only an assemblage of the aggregates'. But, as Ñānavīra Thera points out, this abolishes nothing. (a) It does not abolish the individual because there **is** an individual just as much as there **is** a chariot when the parts are assembled **in a certain functional arrangement**. If a man sees a chariot assembled into working order and says 'in the highest sense there is no chariot, there is merely an assemblage of parts', all he is saying is that 'it is possible to take the chariot into pieces and collect them in a heap, and then there is no chariot but a heap of parts'. Therefore the argument does not indicate that there is **no** chariot; at best it only tells us that the chariot can be destroyed and made into a heap of parts. When it comes to the individual the argument runs into worse difficulties. Even in imagination we cannot conceive the individual being taken apart into the separate aggregates and piled up in a heap as the pieces of the chariot can be. Just as the lynch-pins, the wheels, the floor-boards, etc. can be distinctly separated from one another and piled up, we cannot so separate matter, feeling, perception, determinations and consciousness from one another and pile them up. The individual is **always** an assemblage of the aggregates that can **never** be assembled in any other fashion **than what it is**. Therefore, to say of an individual 'in the highest sense there is no individual, there is merely an assemblage of the aggregates' is to be unintelligible. It is pure and simple speculation which has nothing whatever to do with experience. (b) It does not abolish self simply because there is no self to abolish. (c) It does not abolish holding to belief in self simply because holding to belief in self cannot be abolished by thinking that 'in the highest sense there is no individual, there is merely an assemblage of the aggregates'. (Some mystics are of the view that self lies apart from the assemblage of the aggregates!) In fact the primary purpose behind this argument is to do away with belief in self; but the identification of the individual with self has been taken for granted so



much that it has been thought not necessary as much as to mention self. When the Buddha says that "both self and what belongs to self actually and in truth are not to be found", what is meant by the words "actually and in truth" (*saccato thetato*) is: in the right view of the noble disciple who sees dependent-arising and cessation. The *puthujjana* not seeing dependent-arising (of the five-holding-aggregates) and cessation (of the the five-holding-aggregates) misunderstands the whole thing. He lets the horse escape and closes the stable door behind it. 'Self' goes scot-free, to continue its own way. In this way he is also led to think that he understands what in truth he does not.<sup>1</sup>

On the face of it the answer given by the nun Vajirā appears very simple; but so many things are involved. 'Being' is referred to by Vajirā as *dukkha* and nothing else simply because what there is, is nothing but the taking of impermanent things to be 'I', 'mine' and 'self', i.e. nothing but the five-holding-aggregates; and the taking of things to be 'I', 'mine' and 'self' (the five-holding-aggregates) is **in the eyes of him who sees impermanence** nothing but *dukkha*. Such a one sees that the structure of the five-holding-aggregates is just the structure of *dukkha*; for *dukkha* is impermanent '(my) self', and that is what the five-holding-aggregates are at all times, at least incipiently.<sup>2</sup> "What, monks, is *dukkha*? It should be said that it is the five-holding-aggregates."<sup>3</sup> As

1. The Milindapanha and the Visuddhimagga have both misunderstood the reply by Vajirā to Māra in precisely the manner we have indicated.
2. The existentialist says that "the essence of our world is perhaps betrayal". Six Existential Thinkers, p. 78). He uses the word "perhaps" because of his uncertainty, he smells something wrong somewhere, but is not certain that anything **is** wrong; nor does he see **what** is wrong. If he is certain there is something wrong, and sees what is wrong, he will say; The essence of our world **is** betrayal. Though the betrayal may not **manifest** immediately, an impermanent '(my) self' **is** a betrayal, because it is an impermanent thing taken as permanent (by taking it as self).
3. Katamancabhikkhave dukkham? Pancupādānakkhadatissa vacanīyam. Saṃyuttanikāya III, Khandhasaṃyutta, Antavagga, Sutta No. 2.)



against this, Māra the Evil one is involved with wrong view. Though Māra sees that the chariot is an assemblage of parts, he **cannot** see that the creature (*satto*) is just an assemblage of the holding-aggregates, simply because he cannot conceive the creature other than in terms of a (permanent) self. Taking the creature (i.e. the five-holding-aggregates) as a self, as an eternal or extra-temporal selfsame subject, he refers to it as 'who' (*kuvam*) and as '**the** creature.' In fact he is a self in his own eyes so much that he **always** intends and acts as if he is a self; and there is a problem for him—which he puts in the form of the four questions he asks—precisely because he does this wrong thing. Māra, the *puthujjana*, must give his existence that persistence in time as the **same subject**, otherwise he is led into anxiety; but yet he finds it all so ambiguous, hence his questions.<sup>1</sup> To Vajirā, the word 'creature' is **only** a conventional way of designating the assemblage of aggregates (with or without holding) or the pile of pure determinations (*suddhasankhārapunjo*). Not so to Māra. To Māra, the word 'creature' is not a conventional designation for the assemblage: it is the designation for a self. Māra falls for the deception 'self' and considers the holding-aggregates, in one

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1. This is precisely the dilemma Kierkegaard finds in when he says that 'the difficulty facing an existing individual is how to give his existence the continuity without which everything simply vanishes'. The continuity Kierkegaard seeks to give his existence is nothing but how he is to be a self or soul. Much as he tries, he finds he cannot be one. Being a *puthujjana* he further sees no way out of the situation he does not know that his seeking is the work of *bhavatanha*.

The essence of Kierkegaard's philosophy is this: He, as an existing individual thinks and cannot help thinking that 'I am'. But whenever he asks, '**What** is it that I **am**?' he always gets the answer: **not**—this. So he finds that A is not-A; and that is mystic. This leaves him with no options but to have faith in mysticism. And God being the supreme emblem of mysticism, he embraces faith in God. In this way, God is, for Kierkegaard, not just postulate, but a **necessary** postulate. The problem of how he is to have faith in God (or how he is to be a Christian)—which is really what he sets out to do—is in this way solved by his concluding that he **has** to have faith in God.

It is interesting to note that Kierkegaard takes reflexion as selfhood.



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way or another, as actually being a self. Accordingly, he gets the notion of an essentially the same subject (i. e. a self) arising (i.e. being born), persisting (i.e. existing), and ceasing (i.e. dying). And he uses the words 'who' and 'the creature' to denote this subject; it is the same as 'person' (*sakkāya*). Māra is full of 'person'-view (*sakkāyaditthi*)

In short, when Vajirā tells Māra that "there is here no creature to be found" (*na yidha sattuppalabbhati*), what she means to tell Māra is that there is no creature **such as is conceived by Mara** to be found. In other words, she tells Māra that there is no creature which can be taken as a self as he does, and consequently, **his questions are invalid**; and that, in the eyes of the one who sees rightly, there is only an assemblage of aggregates, which, if it is with holding—and that is what is implied—is just *dukkha*. The simile of the chariot is to indicate Māra's mistake by pointing out to Māra that the 'creature' exists, just as the chariot does, only as a temporal complex of parts; and that therefore the 'creature' should not be regarded in any way whatsoever as an eternal monolithic whole, i.e. as a self.

In another Sutta we find the Buddha answering as follows when asked as to what extent there is right view: "This world, *Kaccāna*, is for the most part bound by engaging, holding and adherence; and this one (this individual) does not engage or hold or resolve that engaging and holding, that mental resolving adherence and tendency: 'my self'. It is just *dukkha* that arises, *dukkha* that ceases—about this he does not hesitate or doubt; his knowledge herein is not dependent on others. Thus far, *Kaccāna*, there is right view.<sup>1</sup>" This view is the **only** view that will lead to the final cessation of

1. Upāyapādānābhīnivesavinibaddho khvāyaṃ Kaccānaloke yebhuyena; taṃ ca upāyupādānaṃ cetaso adhitthānaṃ abhinivesānusayaṃ na upeti na upādiyati nāditthāti: attā me ti. Dukkhaṃ eva uppajjamānaṃ uppajjati, dukkhaṃ nirujjhamanaṃ nirujjhati ti na kankhati na vicikicchati, aparapaccayā ñānaṃ eva'assa ettha hoti. Ettāvata kho Kaccāna sammāditthi hoti. (*Samyuttanikāya II, Abhisamayasaṃyutta, Aharavagga, Sutta No. 5*).



## THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING AND THE AMBIGUITY OF EXISTENCE

all *dukkha*, and it is the only view that is based on **rightly** seeing. Further, the knowledge that it is *dukkha* that arises and *dukkha* that ceases is described by the Buddha as a "knowledge that is not dependent on others" (*aparapaccayāñāna*). Essentially it means that it is a knowledge that does not depend on or get affected by **whatever** others may do or say to him. It gives him who has this knowledge genuine confidence in himself; he is then his own refuge, and he is contented with himself and his own thinking. These things were **not** in him before. He had no genuine confidence in himself, until then. Further, this knowledge is not a knowledge he can **get** from a *puthujjana*; nor is it one that he can **share** with them, since it is a knowledge that is "noble, beyond the world, not in common with *puthujjanas*" (*ariyaṃ lokuttaraṃ asadhāraṇaṃ putthujjānāchi*)..<sup>1</sup> It is a knowledge he has derived by **his own** seeing, with of course the assistance of the Buddha's Teaching. It is a **private** knowledge. And, as can be seen from the Suttas, the individual who has this knowledge is not unduly concerned about others not having it. He is certainly prepared to help others to get it for themselves **only if** these other people indicate to him that they are themselves keen to get it. Thus he does not display an inordinate zeal to convert others into thinking as he does.

*Anicca* (impermanent, or not eternal), *dukkha* (unpleasurable) and *anattā* (not-self), are not three adjectives which set out to describe the *puthujjana*'s experience in order to satisfy his intellectual curiosity. Indeed, one of the primary causes that prevent an understanding of the Buddha's Teaching is the preconceived notion or assumption that this triad of adjectives *anicca—dukkha—anatta*—forms a pure and simple objective description of **any** individual's experience, including that of the arahat's. Certainly to him who has *aniccasaññā*, *dukkhasaññā* and *anattasaññā*, the triad does describe the *puthujjana*'s experience; and in fact, as a triad it does apply to some degree or other to all experience **other than** the arahat's.<sup>2</sup> But it is

1. Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 48.

2. The arahat's experience is no doubt *anicca*. But this is to be distinguished from the *anicca* of the triad *anicca-dukkha-anattā*. The difference is in **that which** is perceived to be *anicca*. The perception of *anicca* is for this reason **not** unpleasurable for the arahat. This will be discussed further in this Chapter.



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at the same time of a very much higher significance. For the **inescapable** consequence of seeing the Buddha's *anicca-dukkha-anattā* is the pressing indication that there **is** a definite task to perform. In the final analysis the *puthujjana* sees no meaning to his 'being' because he sees no definite and meaningful task to perform, a task that would justify his 'being'. That is why he has no option but to lose himself in the infinite distractions of the world, which are hardly anything more than to eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.<sup>1</sup> The noble disciple (*āriyasāvako*) on the other hand sees a definite and meaningful task to perform, the performance of which only justifies his 'Being'. The performance of this task is also the meaning to his 'being'; and he sees that this task, the performance of which gives meaning and justification to his 'being', is nothing but the bringing this very 'being' to an **end**. "I, divine, make known the noble world-transcending Teaching as the proper wealth of man."<sup>2</sup> (All other wealths—lands, houses, gold, wives, children, etc.—**do** appear to the *puthujjana* as wealth, and so he goes in pursuit of them. Having gone in pursuit of them he gains them. But from the time he gains them the wealthiness he

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1. In his *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (in English *The Myth of Sisyphus*) Camus wishes to determine why man, sensing the absurdity of his existence and unable to come to terms with the universe, does not commit suicide. The answer to this is: because of craving-for-'being' (*bhavatanhā*). And It is precisely because of this craving-for-'being' which is associated with the perception of pleasurable that Camus is led to refusing suicide, and not because of the rather unconvincing reason he gives as follows: "Thus I draw from the absurd three consequences which are my revolt, my freedom and my passion. By the mere activity of consciousness I transform into a rule of life what was an invitation to death—and I refuse suicide." (p. 55) Being a *puthujjana*, Camus sees neither craving-for-'being' nor upon what craving-for-'being' depends; and so also, like other *puthujjanas*, he sees no meaningful task to perform in life.

2. Ariyaṃ kho ahaṃ, brāhmaṇa, dhammaṃ purisassa sandhanaṃ paññāpemi (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 96.)

This is a statement which the *puthujjana* can only take on trust until such time as he makes the effort and ceases to be a *puthujjana*.



saw in them earlier steadily declines. With the Buddha's Teaching the case is opposite right along. The *puthujjana* does not see the Teaching as wealth. Not seeing it as wealth, he does not go after it, and therefore does not gain it. However certain *puthujjanas*—and this class is pretty rare—though, they do not see it as wealth, surmise that it **could** be wealth when they first come across it. Surmising that it could be wealth, they go in pursuit of it. If they do gain it—which means if they do achieve proper understanding of it and consequently cease to be *puthujjanas*—then they realise that it is, in the final analysis, the **only** wealth worthy of being called a wealth, and also that it is a wealth, the wealthiness of which increases day by day.)

The *puthujjana* keeps perceiving things as *nicca-sukkhatta* (permanent-pleasurable-self). It is the 'stream' along which he goes—the **ordinary** stream—, and the word *puthujjana* means "ordinary individual" or "commoner." The Buddha's *anicca-dukkha-anattā* alters him to going **against** this stream. That is why the Buddha described his Teaching as "going against the stream" (*patīsotagāmi*).<sup>1</sup> It goes against the stream along which the *puthujjana* goes.<sup>2</sup> And he who does go against this stream along which the *puthujjana* goes—with of course the necessary right understanding about it—is described by the Buddha as an *āriya*, i.e. a 'noble', or "one beyond the ordinary". How, indeed, can one whose fundamental thinking is ordinary be described as beyond the ordinary?

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We have said that if the first noble truth is seen, then the second, third and fourth are also seen. That means if *dukkha* is seen, the arising of *dukkha*, the ceasing of *dukkha*, and the path leading to the ceasing of *dukkha* is seen. We have also said that our explanations must be in keeping with the principle of dependent—arising and ceasing. Let us now see whether

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1. Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 26.

2. This makes it clear why the Buddha's Teaching is so inaccessible to the *puthujjana*'s disinterested scholarship.



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these conditions have been satisfied in our explanation of *dukkha*.

We have pointed out that the *dukkha* of the first noble truth is just the five-holding-aggregates; and that this is not simply because things are impermanent; but because impermanent things are taken as 'I' 'mine' and 'self'. In other words, it is because the five-holding-aggregates are a **holding to impermanent things**. Thus the condition without which there cannot be *dukkha* is holding. In Pali terms, *dukkha* depends upon *upādāna*. There **must** be holding if there is to be *dukkha*. *Dukkha* is therefore something that is dependently-arisen (*paticcasamuppanna*). Likewise, if holding is not there i.e. if there is no taking of things as 'I', 'mine' and 'self', then *dukkha* is also not there. When holding ceases *dukkha* also ceases. *Dukkha* is therefore something that ceases when the conditions upon which it depends cease. Here then is to be found the fundamental meaning of the second noble truth—the noble truth of the arising of *dukkha*—, and of the third noble truth—the noble truth of the ceasing of *dukkha*.

"Dependent upon what foundation is this *dukkha* formed? By the destruction of all holding there is no coming to being of *dukkha*."<sup>1</sup> Now, in Chapter VIII we saw that holding is itself dependent upon craving (*tanhā*). Holding arises only with the arising of craving, and likewise, holding ceases with the ceasing of craving. Naturally, it follows that *dukkha* depends upon craving. And in the standard definitions of the second and third noble truths it is craving that is pointed out:

"This indeed, monks, is the noble truth of the arising of *dukkha*: that craving, leading to more 'being', conjoined with desire and lust, delighting in this and that—this is to say: craving-for-sensuality, craving-for-'being', craving-for-'unbeing'."

"This indeed, monks is the noble truth of the ceasing of *dukkha*: the entire fading out and cessation, the giving up,

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1. Upādhiṃ paticca dukkhamidaṃ sambhoti  
Sabbūpādānakkhayā natthi dukkhassa sambhavo.

(Udāna, Nandavagga, Sutta No. 10).



the relinquishment, of that same craving, the release from it, its abandonment."<sup>1</sup>

The *puthujjana* craves, and it is fundamentally a craving to **be**, which is really a craving for more 'being' (*bhavatanhā*). This is because he perceives and feels pleasure in 'being', at the same time assuming—because of his non-perception of impermanence—'being' to be actually being self. (Feeling pleasure and the perception of it is there only in the structure of 'being'.) Craving, he holds; and holding, he creates 'being' which is nothing but *dukkha*.

Conversely, if there is no craving, then there is no holding; hence no *dukkha*.

But how is he to stop this craving?

For him to stop it he must **see** that the 'being' it creates and re-creates is just *dukkha*; and for him to see that all is *dukkha* he must also see that **all** is impermanent, since it is this vision of impermanence that **leads** him to see *dukkha*. In short, **he must see impermanence**; he must see that "Whatsoever has the nature of arising, all that has the nature of ceasing."

When one sees impermanence in this all-embracing manner, one sees that 'being' is just *dukkha*. One then attenuates craving-for-'being'. When one attenuates craving-for-'being',—one attenuates holding. When one attenuates holding, one attenuates 'being'. And one attenuates 'being' just means—one attenuates *dukkha*. (It may be noted that when craving-for-'being' is attenuated the craving-for-'unbeing' and craving-for-sensuality are also attenuated.)

Further, the **path** to the cessation of *dukkha* must lie essentially in **countering** things being 'I', 'mine' and 'self', and with right understanding.

1. *Idaṃ kho pana bhikkhave dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ. Yāyaṃ tanhā ponobhavikā nandirāgasahagatā tatra tatrābhinandanī, seyyathidaṃ kāmataṇhā bhavataṇhā vibhavataṇhā.*

*Idaṃ kho pana bhikkhave dukkhanirodaṃ ariyasaccaṃ. Yo tassāyeva tanhāya asesavirāganirodho cāgo patinissaggo mutti anālayo. (Mahāvagga I, Pancavaggiyakathā, Dhammacakkhappavattana Sutta.)*



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“How understanding, how seeing, Lord, does there not come to be in this body having consciousness, and in all external indications, the latent tendencies to the conceits of ‘I’—making and ‘mine’—making?”<sup>1</sup>

“Rāhula, whatever matter.....feeling.....perception.....determinations.....consciousness, be it past, future, or present, internal or external, coarse or fine, inferior or superior—all consciousness (is to be regarded as): ‘Not, this is mine; not, this am I; not, this is my self’. That is seeing things as they really are by right understanding.

“Thus understanding, thus seeing, Rāhula, in this body having consciousness, and in all external indications, there comes to be no latent tendencies to the conceits of ‘I’—making and ‘mine’—making.”<sup>1</sup>

From this we further see that the path to the extinction of *dukkha* is a development that is **against** the *puthujjana*’s reflexive experience. It is a “going against the stream” along which **he** goes. The *puthujjana* constantly thinks: ‘this is mine; this am I; this is my self’. The Buddha points out to him that this is wrong, and teaches him to see and think: ‘Not, this is mine; not, this am I; not, this is my self’. When this “going against the stream” is practised there comes a time when the latent tendencies to the conceits of ‘I’-making and ‘mine’-making which is the root-**nature** of reflexive experience (except that of the *arahat*’s)—are uprooted, and with their

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1. Kathaṃ nu kho bhante jānato kathaṃ passato imasmiṃca saviññānake kāye bahiddhā ca sabbaenimittesu ahaṃkāra-mamaṃkāramānānusayā na hontīti?

Yaṃ kinci Rāhula rūpaṃ....vedanā....saññā....sankhārā....viññānaṃ atītānāgatapaccuppannam ajjhataṃ vā bahiddhā va olārikaṃ vā sukhumaṃ vā hīnaṃ vā panitaṃ vā yaṃ dūre santike vā sabbaṃ vinnanam: na etaṃ mama, na eso aham asmi, na eso me atta ti. Evaṃ etaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammapaññāya passati.

Evaṃ kho Rāhula jānato evaṃ passato imasmin ca saviññānake kāye bahiddhā ca sabbanimittesu ahaṃkāramamaṃkāramānānūsayā na hontī ti. (Saṃyuttanikāya III, Khandhasaṃyutta, Theravagga, Sutta No. 9).



uprooting, **all** notions of 'I', 'mine', and 'self' are cut off so that they can never arise again.

There is of course very much more to be said about the path to the extinction of *dukkha* which is the fourth noble truth. It is in fact described by the Buddha as the noble eightfold path (*ariyo atthangiko maggo*). "This, monks, is the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*, this noble eightfold path, that it to say: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration."<sup>1</sup> But here we are concerned with it only in the context of very fundamentally and briefly seeing it as the fourth noble truth **with** the seeing of the first noble truth. We shall therefore be dealing with it in greater detail later on.

Now, with our explanation of the Buddha's *anicca-dukkha-anattā* the following Sutta wherein the whole of the Buddha's Teaching is summarized would perhaps become comprehensible and **all-of-a-piece**:

"Matter, monks, is impermanent. What is impermanent, that is unpleasurable, what is unpleasurable, that is not-self. What is not-self, that (should be seen) as: 'Not, this is mine; not, this am I; not, this is my self'. That is how it should be seen as it really is by right understanding."

"Feeling, monks, is impermanent. What is impermanent; that is unpleasurable; what is unpleasurable, that is not self. What is not-self, that (should be seen) as: 'Not, this is mine: not, this am I; not, this is my self'. That is how it should be seen as it really is by right understanding."

"Perception, monks, is impermanent. What is impermanent, that is unpleasurable; what is unpleasurable, that is not-self. What is not-self, that (should be seen) as: 'Not, this is mine; not, this am I; not, this is my self'. That is how it should be seen as it really is by right understanding."

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1. Idam kho pana bhikkhave dukkhanirodhagāminī patipadā ariyasaccaṃ ayameva ariyo atthangiko maggo, seyyathidaṃ: sammāditthi, sammā-sankappo, sammāvācā, sammākammanto, sammājīvo, sammāvāyāmo, sammāsaṭi, sammāsamādhi. (Mahāvagga I, Pancavaggiyakathā, Dhammaccakkappavattana Sutta).



“Determinations, monks, are impermanent. What is impermanent, that is unpleasurable; what is unpleasurable, that is not-self. What is not-self, that (should be seen) as: ‘Not, this is mine; not, this am I; not, this is my self’. That is how it should be seen as it really is by right understanding.”

“Consciousness, monks, is impermanent. What is impermanent, that is unpleasurable, what is unpleasurable, that is not-self. What is not-self, that (should be seen) as: ‘Not, this is mine; not, this am I; not, this is my self’. That is how it should be seen as it really is by right understanding.”

“Thus seeing, monks, the instructed noble disciple turns away from matter, turns away from feeling, turns away from perception, turns away from determinations, turns away from consciousness. Turning away, he loses passion. Through dispassion, he is released. In release, the knowledge is: it is release. He understands: birth is exhausted, the life of purity is fulfilled, what was to be done is done, there is no more in here-ness.”<sup>1</sup>

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1. Rūpam bhikkhave aniccaṃ. Yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ, yaṃ dukkhaṃ tad anattā. Yad anattā taṃ na etaṃ mama na eso ahaṃ asmi na me so attā ti. Evaṃ etaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammapaññāya datthabbaṃ. Vedanā bhikkhave aniccā. Yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ, yaṃ dukkhaṃ tad anattā. Yad anattā taṃ na etaṃ mama na eso ahaṃ asmi na me so attā ti. Evaṃ etaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammapaññāya datthabbaṃ. Saññā bhikkhave aniccā. Yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ, yaṃ dukkhaṃ tad anattā. Yaṃ anattā taṃ na etaṃ mama na eso ahaṃ asmi na me so att ti. Evaṃ etaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammapaññāya datthabbaṃ. Sankhārā bhikkhave aniccā. Yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ, yaṃ dukkhaṃ tad anattā. Yad anattā taṃ na etaṃ mama na eso ahaṃ asmi na me so attā ti. Evaṃ etaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammapaññāya datthabbaṃ. Viññānaṃ bhikkhave aniccaṃ. Yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ, yaṃ dukkhaṃ tad anattā. Yad anattā taṃ na etaṃ mama na eso ahaṃ asmi na me so attā ti. Evaṃ etaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammapaññāya datthabbaṃ. Evaṃ passaṃ bhikkhave sutavā ariyasāvako rūpasmiṃ pi nibbindati vedanāya pi nibbindati saññāya pi nibbindati sankhāresu pi nibbindati viññānasmim pi nibbindati. Nibbindaṃ virajjati. Virāgā vimuccati. Vimuttasmim vimuttaṃ iti ñānaṃ hoti: Khinā jāti vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ kataṃ karanīyaṃ nāparam itthattāyitā pajānātīti. (Saṃyutta-nikāya III, Khandhasaṃyutta, Aniccavagga, Sutta No. 4).



What we have said regarding the ceasing of *dukkha* is also indicated in the following very briefly worded statement of the Buddha to Bāhiya Dāruciriya—a statement which says a great deal more than would seem to appear:

“Then, Bāhiya, you should train thus: ‘In the seen there shall be just the seen; in the heard there shall be just the heard; in the sensed there shall be just the sensed; in the cognized there shall be just the cognized.’ Thus, Bāhiya, should you train yourself. When, Bāhiya, for you in the seen there shall be just the seen, in the heard there shall be just the heard, in the sensed there shall be just the sensed, in the cognized there shall be just the cognized, then, Bāhiya, you (will) not (be) that by which; when, Bāhiya, you (will) not (be) that by which, then, Bāhiya, you (will) not (be) there; when, Bāhiya, you (will) not (be) there, then, Bāhiya, you (will) neither (be) here nor yonder nor between the two. Just this is the end of *dukkha*.’”<sup>1</sup>

In this statement there are five references made by the Buddha as the ‘that by which’ (*tena*), the ‘there’ (*tattha*), the ‘here’ (*Idam*), the ‘yonder’ (*huraṃ*), and the ‘between the two’ (*ubhayamantare*). If we are to understand this statement it is necessary that we determine what these things refer to.

Now I, as a conscious living being, am also what can be referred to as ‘my world’ or as ‘my existence’. If I do not see or hear or smell or taste or touch or think, then I cannot say that I exist. And if I see or hear or smell or taste or touch or think, then there are **things** that are seen, heard, smelt, tasted, touched and thought. This means that in the very act of ‘being’ I disclose an existentially spatial world. ‘Being’ is always in

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1. Tasmātiha te Bāhiya evaṃ sikkhitabbaṃ: ditthe ditthamattaṃ bhavissati sute sutamattaṃ bhavissati mute mutamattaṃ bhavissati viññāte viññātamattaṃ bhavissati ti. Evaṃ hi te Bāhiya sikkhitabbaṃ. Yato kho te Bāhiya ditthe ditthamattaṃ bhavissati sute sutamattaṃ bhavissati mute mutamattaṃ bhavissati viññāte viññātamattaṃ bhavissati tato tvam Bāhiya na tena; yato tvam Bāhiya na tena, tato tvam Bāhiya na tattha; yato tvam Bāhiya na tattha tato tvam Bāhiya nevida na huraṃ na ubhayamantare. Esevanto dukkhassā ti. (Udāna, Bodhivagga, Sutta No. 10).



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the form of a spatial '**being-in-a-situation.**' At any given time, this 'being-in-a-situation' is precisely the same as 'my world'. Heidegger calls it "being-in-the-world". It is also precisely the same as what we referred to in Chapter VI as 'my self as determined by my whole situation'. As we mentioned earlier, in spite of all what mystics may say, there cannot be a 'pure being'. 'Being' is always 'being-in-a-situation'; it is always particularized and limited.

In the statement to Bāhiya, this 'my world' is considered as comprising three separately discernible parts. They are: (1) my six sense organs (i.e. the internal bases). (2) the six sense objects or the things perceived by the six sense organs (i.e. the six external bases), and (3) those things dependent upon these six sense organs and the six sense objects.

What are those things dependent upon the six sense organs and the six sense objects?

They are those items beginning with contact and consciousness given to us in the Suttas as follows:

"Dependent upon eye and sight arises eye-consciousness. The coming together of the three is called contact. With contact as condition, feeling; with feeling as condition, craving; with craving as condition holding; with holding as condition, 'being'; with 'being' as condition, birth; with birth as condition, ageing-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are formed."<sup>1</sup> And so with the other five sense organs and five sense objects.

Therefore the 'world'—which is the sum total of the sense organs, the sense objects, and those dependent upon the sense organs and the sense objects—is defined as follows:

"Where indeed, Samicdhi, there is eye, there are sights, there is eye-consciousness, there are things cognized by eye-

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1. Cakkhunca paticca rupe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññānaṃ. Tinnam saṅghati phasso. Phassapaccayā vedanā; vedanāpaccayā tanhā; tanhāpaccayā upādānaṃ; upādānaṃpaccayā bhavo; bhavapaccayā jāti; jātipaccayā jarāmaranaṃ sokaparidevadukkhā domanassupāyāsā sambhavanti. (Saṃyuttanikāya II, Abhisamayasaṃyutta, Gahapativagga, Sutta No. 4)



consciousness, there, there is a world and a discerning of the world. Where there is ear,.....nose,.....tongue,.....body,.....mind, there are thoughts, there are things cognized by mind-consciousness, there, there is a world and a discerning of the world,"<sup>1</sup>

In the statement to Bāhiya, the six sense organs are the 'here' (*idam*); and the six sense objects, or the **things** seen, heard, smelt, tasted, touched and thoughts, are the 'yonder' (*huraṃ*). The individual **purely and simply as the six sense organs** is **towards** this 'yonder'; he is **directional** to it; he is **concerned** with it; it is the "ready-to-hand" of Heidegger's, something that is **for** some purpose (of mine). So that the 'here' is the sense organs which are surrounded by the 'yonder' that is the sense objects; in other words, the 'here' is the six internal bases which are surrounded by the 'yonder' which are the six external bases; and 'between the two' are those things—namely, contact, consciousness, etc.—that stand depending upon this 'here' and this 'yonder'. The 'world', then is the sum total of this 'here', 'yonder' and 'between the two'; and in the statement to Bāhiya it is the 'there' (or the 'in that place' or the 'in that situation'—*tattha*). (In Chapter V we described the 'world' as the sum total of name-and-matter and consciousness. Thus the 'world' can be described in more than one way, depending upon the point of view adopted).

Now for there to be a 'here' and a 'yonder' and a 'between the two' there must be a 'there' for them to be **in**. In other words, for me to be able to say that there are six senses (or six internal bases) and six sense objects (or six external bases) and those things dependent upon them, I must be aware, of a world **in which** they can be. (To the dead body or the body without consciousness there is neither a world nor a six-sense-bases body.) If I exist, it means I am conscious; and if I am conscious,

1. Yattha kho, Samiddhi atthi cakkhum atthi rūpā atthi cakkhuviññānaṃ atthi cakkhuviññānaviññātabbā dhammā atthi tattha loka vā lokapaññātti vā. Atthi sotam .....ghānaṃ .....jivhā .....kāyo .....mano atthi dhammā atthi manoviññānaṃ atthi manoviññānaviññātabbā dhammā atthi tattha loka vā lokapaññātti vā. (Saṃyuttanikāya IV, Migajālavagga, Sutta No. 6).



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then I am conscious of the six sense bases and of the six sense objects and of these things dependent upon them. That means, if I exist, there is a world (for me). When consciousness springs up the world also springs up, simply because consciousness is always consciousness **of something**. And unless (for me) this (my) world springs up, there is (for me) no six senses, no sense objects, and no things in between the two. (For X and Y and Z to be discerned individually there must be discerned a  $X+Y+Z$  for them to be in.) The individual finds himself to be existing (as an assemblage of six senses) only **when** he finds that there is a 'world' (for him), when he finds himself as (in Heidegger's terminology) "being—there" (Dasein). So that, only when there is a 'there', is 'there' a 'here' and a 'yonder' and a, 'between the two.' Conversely, when there is no 'there', then there is no 'here' nor 'yonder' 'between the two'.

We are now left with the 'that by which'. The following passage appearing in another Sutta tells us what this 'that by which' is:

"And by what in the world, friend, is one a world-perceiver and a world-conceiver? By the eye, friend, in the world is one a world-perceiver and a world-conceiver. By the ear..... nose.....tongue.....body.....mind, friend, in the world is one a world-perceiver and a world-conceiver. By which, friend, in the world is one a world-perceiver and a world-conceiver—that is called the world in the discipline of the nobles."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the 'that by which' (*tena*) is the personal reference in *lokasanni* ('world-perceiver') and *lokamāni* ('world-conceiver'). This is what marks the difference between *tena* ('that by which') and *idha* ('here'). The 'that by which' can only

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1. Kena cāvuso lokasmiṃ lokasaññi hoti lokamāni? Cakkhunā kho āvuso lokasmiṃ lokasaññi hoti lokāmanī. Sotena....Ghānena....Jivhāya.... Kāyena.....Manena kho āvuso lokasmiṃ lokasaññi hoti lokamāni. Yena kho āvuso lokasmiṃ lokasaññi hoti lokamāni ayaṃ vuccati ariyassa vinaye loko. (Saṃyuttanikāya IV, Salāyatana-saṃyutta, Lokakāmagunavagga, Sutta No. 3).



mean the 'that-by-which-**I-am**' (—perceiving-and-conceiving-the-world). It is the implicit conceit '(I) am' in all experience. The 'here' (*idha*) is the more explicit conceit '(I) am' = 'this am I', i.e. that part of the world with which I **identify** myself. That is to say, the 'that by which' comes structurally **before** the world, and the 'here' comes **after**. The six senses as the 'that by which' disclose the world without being themselves directly experienced, but as the 'here' they are experienced as a part of the world, and as being in relation to other parts. Therefore the 'here' (*idha*) is dependent upon the 'world' (*tena*), and the 'world' upon the 'that—by which' (*tena*).

So that, we get five distinctive aspects which we can symbolize as follows:

- (1) The 'that by which' (*tena*) = subjectivity ('I') = A
- (2) The 'world' or 'being-there' (*tattha*) = experience as a totality =  $X + Y + Z$
- (3) The 'here' (*idha*) = the six sense bases = X
- (4) The 'yonder' (*huraṃ*) = six sense objects = Y
- (5) The 'between the two' (*ubayamantare*) contact, feeling, etc. = Z

The identification with 'I' can be with  $X + Y + Z$  or with X or Y or Z, though usually it is with X (i.e. the six senses).

It will be seen that the 'that by which' and the 'here' both refer to the six sense bases but in two different senses—first as subjective discloser of the world and second as part of the world disclosed.

So that the position is: (1) The six senses and the six sense objects and those things dependent upon them are individually there **because** there is a 'world' (which is always an existentially spatial world) for them to be **in**; and this 'world' is again nothing but the undifferentiated totality of experience comprising of these very same six senses and six sense objects and those things dependent upon them (2) There is a 'world' to be **in because** there are six senses **by which** the 'world' is disclosed.



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In the terminology of the statement to Bāhiya the position would be as follows: there is a 'here' and a 'yonder' and a 'between the two' **because** there is a 'there' in which they are there; and this 'there' is there only **because** there is a 'that by which' there is a 'there'. It might sound more intelligible if we replace 'there' by 'in that place'; in which case it would read as follows: there is a 'here' and a 'yonder' and a 'between the two' **because** there is a 'in that place' in which they are there and this 'in that place' is there only **because** there is a 'that by which' there is a 'in that place.'

Now, the understanding of the above situation is not wholly and entirely peculiar to the Buddha's Teaching. Existential philosophers like Heidegger have thought along these lines of a 'here' and a 'yonder' and a 'there', though not of a 'between the two' in the same way the Buddha points out. But what these philosophers—or anybody else for that matter **cannot** tell us is: how comes the *dukkha*? and when is *dukkha* **not** there? This the Buddha **only** can tell us: and he **alone** tells us.

He tells us that *dukkha* is not there **only when** in the seen there is **just** the seen, in the heard there is just the heard, and so on with all the sense objects; and that this is because when such is the situation I shall not be 'that by which' and when I shall not be 'that by which' I shall not be 'there', and when I shall not be 'there' I shall neither be 'here' nor 'yonder' nor 'between the two.'

How then is this part to be understood?

As a first step, let us consider it at a simple and rather obvious level, of say, being concerned or **caring**, the word 'caring' being used in its popular day to day sense and not in any fundamental sense.

When I do not care for things seen—the significance of which means that I do not care for sight—then I do not care for that thing by which there is sight for me, i.e. for the eye. (However different the things seen or the sights be, the one thing without which there can be no thing seen or no sight is the eye)



Similarly, when I do not care for things heard—the significance of which means that I do not care for sound—then I do not care for that by which there is sound for me, i.e. for the ear. And so taking into account all the six pairs of sense organs and sense objects, the position comes to be that when I do not care for the sensed I do not care for that by which there is the sensed, i.e. for the sense organs. Note that the position is not the other way round. That is to say, it is not: when I do not care for the senses I do not care for the sensed. It is the sensed that I first and foremost care for; and the six senses are cared for **because** sense experience are cared for.

And further, when I do not care for the six senses then I do not care for being-in-a-situation, for being, 'in that place'. In fact, I do not then care for being-in-any-situation, for being 'in **any** place'. And that again means that I do not then care for the six senses, for the six sense objects, and for those things dependent upon them—**whatever** they be at any time. In short, I do not then care for **anything at all**.

In exactly the same way, when in the seen there is just the seen, in the heard there is just the heard, etc. and these are no longer conceived (*maññati*) as 'I', 'mine' and 'self' — in other words, when in whatever perception there be, there is no longer the conceiving of any subjectivity whatsoever—then there is no longer any *dukkha*. For, when the seen, heard, etc. are no longer conceived as 'I', 'mine' and 'self', then the six senses are no longer conceived as 'I', 'mine' and 'self'; when the six senses are no longer conceived as 'I', 'mine' and 'self', then the 'world' is no longer conceived as 'I', 'mine' and 'self'; and when the 'world' is no longer conceived as 'I', 'mine' and 'self', then neither the six sense organs nor the six sense objects nor those things dependent upon the two are conceived as 'I', 'mine' and 'self'.

In the seen there is just the seen, in the heard there is just the heard, etc., **only when** the seen, the heard, etc., are no longer seen, heard etc., as 'mine' ('this is mine'—*etaṃ mama*) or as 'I' ('this am I'—*eso aham asmi*) or as 'my self' ('this is my self'—*eso me atta*); briefly, when there is no longer in



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connection with the sensed the conceit 'I' am (*asmimāna*), and therefore when in connection with the senses there is no longer the conceit 'I' am **by which** 'I' am a **conceiver** of the world, when there is no longer any 'being' (*bhava*).

When the Buddha says, "When, Bāhiya, you (will) not (be) that by which" (*yato tvam Bāhiya na tena*), he means: when you, Bāhiya, will no longer consider yourself as conceiver and perceiver of the world, and not conceive your six senses as 'I, Bāhiya'; or when you, Bāhiya, (in identifying yourself with experience) will not think, 'these six senses am I'; or again, when you, Bāhiya, will not consider the six senses as 'my self'. Similarly, when the Buddha says, "When Bāhiya, you (will) not (be) there" (*yato tvam Bāhiya na tattha*), he means: when whatever world there is for you, Bāhiya, at any time, you will not conceive that world as '**my** world', or, when you will not think that 'I, Bāhiya' is in that world.

The Sutta tells us that Bāhiya understood this brief statement the Buddha made to him. Being an ascetic Bāhiya may not have been a sophisticated erudite man-of-the-world. But for him to have seen all the implications of this statement without any further elaboration he must indeed have been a very subtle thinker.

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Now, the direct implication of the state of affairs pointed out by the Buddha to Bāhiya is that when neither the 'here' nor the 'yonder' nor the 'between the two' nor the 'there' is conceived as 'I, Bāhiya', then **nothing at all** is conceived as 'I, Bāhiya'. And that brings us to one of the most important things — nevertheless a thing most difficult for the *puthujjana* to see—concerning the arahat; that is, that with the arahat there is no 'being', no 'self'-existence. "Anurādha, the Tathagata, actually and in truth, is here not to be found."<sup>1</sup> As with the Tathāgata (i.e. the Buddha), so with the arahats.

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1. Anurādha, dittheva dhamme saccato thetato Tathāgate anupalabbyamāne. Saṃyuttanikāya IV, Avyākatasammutta, Sutta No. 2).



The Tathāgata, no doubt, has matter, feeling, perception, determinations and consciousness; but there is no longer any matter, feeling, etc. **with which** an 'I' or 'self' might be identified. There is no longer an 'I' or 'self' **for whom** there is matter, feeling, etc. Consciousness, as we pointed out earlier, is always consciousness **of** something. In the non-arāhat there is the consciousness of a subject. That is, his consciousness is **indicative** of 'I' or 'self', which is also the holding-consciousness (*upādāna - viññāna*). In the arāhat there is no **such** consciousness. In him **this** consciousness has been cut off at the root, never to arise again. Similarly, in the arāhat there is no longer the perception of an 'I' or 'self', no longer any feeling determined by an 'I' or 'self', no longer any determinations (intentions) concerning an 'I' or 'self', and no longer any matter conceived as 'I' or 'self' or forming a support for an 'I' or 'self'. The Tathāgata (likewise the arāhat) is therefore said to be **freed** from reckoning as matter, feeling, perception, determinations and consciousness. "Thus indeed, great king, that matter.....that feeling.....that perception.....those determinations.....that consciousness by which the Tathāgata might be manifested has been eliminated by the Tathāgata, cut off at the root, dug up, made non-existent, is incapable of future arising. The Tathāgata indeed, great king, is free from reckoning as consciousness, is deep, immeasurable....."<sup>1</sup> The *puthujjana*, however, can reckon the arāhat also only in terms of a consciousness that is the consciousness of an 'I' or 'self', and because such a consciousness has been cut off in the arāhat, the *puthujjana* is incapable of measuring the arāhat. The same holds good with the other four aggregates. In contrast to the arāhat, the non-arāhat is **not** free from reckoning as matter, feeling, perception, determinations and consciousness. For him there

1. Evaṃ eva kho mahārāja yena rūpena....yāya vedanāya....yāya saññāya....yehi sankhārehi....yena viññānena Tathāgataṃ paññāpayamāno paññapeyya Tathāgataassa pahīnam ucchinnamūlaṃ tālavatthukataṃ anabhāvakataṃ āyatim anuppādadhammaṃ. Viññānasankhāyavimutto kaho mahārāja Tathāgato gambhiro appameyyo....(Saṃyuttanikāya IV Avyākatasāmyutta, Sutta No. 1).



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is an 'I' or 'self' with which these things might be identified, and **for whom** these things are there. Therefore, for this reason, though actually and in truth the arahat is not to be found, **in this sense** the non-arahat actually and in truth **is** to be found.

To the *puthujjana*, his existence of a self, and so, **in his own eyes** (and in the eyes of those like him) he remains as the self-same subject; and this **even though** what he identifies as this selfsame subject is changing, is becoming different. "Monks, there are these three determined-characteristics of the determined. What three? Arising is manifest, passing away is manifest, change while standing is manifest. These, indeed, are the three determined-characteristics of the determined."<sup>1</sup> Here, arising refers to birth, passing away refers to death, and that determined thing that is so born and dies and **changes whilst standing** (in time) between that same birth and death is this apparent 'self', more pointedly — 'my self'. Between the appearance of this 'self' (i.e. birth) and the disappearance of this 'self' (i.e. death) this 'self' is changing or becoming different. And it is precisely because there is a 'self' that is **changing** that there is a problem. In other words, there is a problem because something or other is taken as self, **but yet**, unlike what self claims to be, it is becoming different. It is precisely in **this** too that the problem of dukkha lies. When the whole state of affairs is reckoned this determined thing is the 'person' (*sakkāya*), simply because the five-holding-aggregates are what is taken as being this 'my self'.

It should be very clearly kept in mind that **in the eyes of the putthujjana** there is a self, a subject that **always** is, and hence an unchanging or a standing. (Standing (*thiti*) means **remaining the same**, unchanging.) But in the eyes of him

1. Tīnimāni bhikkhave sankhatassa sankhatalakkhanāni. Katamāni tīni? uppādo paññāyati, vayo paññāyati, thitassa aññathattaṃ paññāyati.

Imāni kho bhikkhave tīni sankhatassa sankhatalakkhanāni ti. (Anguttara-nikāya I, Tikanipāta, Cūlavagga, Sutta No. 7).



who rightly sees, that is in the eyes of him who sees impermanence, there is only 'self' only 'being', or only a 'standing' (all within inverted commas.) So that, actually and in truth (*saccato thetato*) there is no self or a being self; there is only a 'self' and a being 'self', which the *putthujjana* **takes** to be a self and a being self. But this position is not seen by the *putthujjana*, only the noble disciple (*ariyasāvaka*) sees it because of his perception of impermanence. He also sees that this being 'self' is nothing but *dukkha*.

With the arahat in whom no *dukkha* arises any more, there is no notion of 'I' or 'self'. In him the latent tendencies to the conceit of 'I' making and 'mine'-making, or the involuntary and instinctive conceiving of 'I' and 'mine', is cut off, never to arise again. And since there is no notion of 'I' or 'self' arising there is nothing being conceived as 'I' or viewed as self. Consequently, with the arahat there is no 'person'. Hence for the arahat there is no 'being', no 'remaining the same subject'. "Monks, there are these three not-determined characteristics of the not-determined. What three? Arising is not manifest, passing away is not manifest, change while standing is not manifest. These indeed, monks, are the three not-determined characteristics of the not-determined."<sup>1</sup> There is an arahatness (*arahattaya*) that is being experienced, which we refer to as the 'arahat's life' or as the 'living experience of the arahat'. That is all. But no 'person' or 'self' with regard to the arahat is to be found. And that means no 'person' or 'self' is determined. For this reason arahatness is referred to as the **not-determined** (*asankhata*). Being not-determined, there can be no appearance, no disappearance and no change while standing.

Lest any confusion may arise here, we may point out that in the arahat's experience the three characteristics of arising, passing away and changing whilst standing are not manifest

1. Tīnimāni bhikkhave asankhatassa asankhatalakkhanāni. Katamāni tīni? Na uppādo paññāyati na vayo paññāyati na thitassa aññathattam paññāyati. Imāni kho bhikkhave tīni asakhatassa asankhatalakkhanāni. (*Anguttaranikāya* I, Tikanipāta, Cūlavagga, Sutta No. 8)



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**only** with regard to an 'I' or 'self' for the simple reason that there is no 'I' or 'self' in his experience. It does **not** mean that in his experience these three characteristics are not manifest in **other** things. In fact they are manifest in other things—in his body, feelings, perception, in external objects, etc. The question may be asked: why don't the Suttas make the distinction? The answer is simple; they are pointing out *dukkha* and its cessation **only**.

Though we use the word 'arahat' for purposes of identification there is no 'person' called an arahat. There, there is no 'person' to be found; no 'I am arahat' or 'this arahatness, is mine'. In conversation, the arahat no doubt uses words and phrases current in the world. He uses the words 'I', 'mine', 'you', 'he', 'she', etc.<sup>1</sup> But that is obviously for want of other words and in any case, even if he uses other words, the *puthujjana* will not understand things any better for it. We can distinguish one arahat from another as two different individuals. But with regard to the arahat there is no 'person' or 'somebody' or 'self', no conceiving 'I' and 'mine'. The arahat intentionally acts, but the action is quite unaccompanied by any thought of a subject who is acting. In a letter to the author dated (8-7-62) Ñānavīra Thera wrote: "For all non-arahats such thoughts (in varying degrees, of course) do arise. The arahat remains an individual (i.e. distinct from other individuals), but is no longer a **person** (i.e. a **somebody**, a **self**, a subject). This is not—as you might perhaps be tempted to think—a distinction without a difference. It is a genuine distinction, a very difficult distinction, but a distinction that must be made."

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1. See Saṃyuttanikāya I, Devatāsāmyutta, Sattivagga, Sutta No. 5. In this Sutta the Buddha states that the arahat uses the words 'I' and 'mine' but it does not mean that he conceives any subjectivity whatsoever. The Sutta says that the arahat has "passed beyond conceiving" (*vitivatto maññānam*).



Whether it is for the arahat or for the *puthujjana* there is no being self, because there is no self to be. But to the *puthujjana* there is a being 'self' (which he wrongly takes as being-self) because there is to him 'self' (which he wrongly takes as self). To the arahat there is **not even** this being 'self' because with the arahat there is **nothing whatsoever taken as self** or even as 'I' and 'mine'. In other words, whilst the *puthujjana*'s life is a 'being' (*bhava*), the arahat's is the cessation of 'being' (*bhavanirodha*). Of the arahat it is said: "Not determining, not intending 'being' or 'unbeing', he does not hold to anything in the world" — so *anabhisānikaronto anabhisancetayanto bhavayā vā vibhavayā vā na kinci loke upādiyati*.<sup>1</sup> Thus an arahat is an individual, but is no longer a 'person', no longer a 'self'.

This distinction—the distinction that the arahat is an individual but not a 'person'—, difficult indeed as it is, is of the utmost importance. It is **the** distinction that has to be seen; and if it is not seen arahat-ness is also not seen, and if arahat-ness, which is the experience of the cessation of *dukkha*, is not seen, then the Buddha's Teaching is not seen.

But the *puthujjana* cannot see this distinction. He cannot distinguish between individuality and personality'. To him, there is always only a 'personality', and individuality is identical with it.<sup>2</sup> The arahat is an individual (*puggala*) in the sense

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1. Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 140.

2. The inability to see the distinction between 'personality' and individuality (as it is with the case of any *puthujjana*) has caused immense confusion in the minds of Heidegger and Satre when they come to the question of anxiety in the face of nothingness, which nothingness, for their purposes, is merely death. The arahat having no 'personality' sees no possibility of a nothingness to a 'personality', and consequently can have no anxiety whatsoever. His life reaching its end is only a reaching an individual nothingness, and the perception of this causes no anxiety whatsoever. But neither Heidegger nor Satre knows anything about the difference between 'personality' and individuality. So that all their philosophizing is well and good, but they neither see an answer to anxiety nor a way out of anxiety.



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that he is a sequence of events which that, until his life ceases, can be described as the one and the same individual, and further he is a distinct set of five-aggregates (**not** five-holding-aggregates) as separate from another set which is another individual arahat. But there is no holding (*upādāna*),<sup>1</sup> and hence there is no 'person' (*sakkāya*).

As we just said, this state of affairs concerning the arahat is a very difficult thing to see, very subtle. That is why the Buddha described his Teaching as "subtle, profound, difficult to see" (*nīpunam gambhīro dūddasam*).<sup>2</sup>

(This does not of course mean that **every** thing the Buddha teaches is very subtle and difficult to grasp. But it is indeed difficult to grasp the essential and most important things he teaches, and these are the very things that **only** he can teach.)

Subjectivity—the conceits 'I', 'mine' and 'am'—is a parasite on the structure of experience. The Buddha discovered this by experiencing the utter destruction of this sub-

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1. The Visuddhimagga (Ch. XVII) defines *upādāna* as follows: *Upādānanti delhaggahanam, dalhattho h'ettha upa-saddo*. If we render *upādāna* as holding, the English rendering of this sentence would be: "Holding is firm seizing, for here the prefix *upa* has the sense of firmness." Now, whether we render *upādāna* as holding, or as clinging, or as grasping, etc., and whether we render *gahanam* as seizing, or as grasping, etc., this definition still provides us with only a synonym for *upādāna*, and does not at all explain to us well enough what *upādāna* is. But perhaps the more serious defect is that it leaves us room to think that seizing (or grasping, etc.) **lightly**—as against firmly—may **not** be *upādāna*. That means to the arahat who has completely destroyed *upādāna* can **possibly** be seizing or grasping (or whatsoever else it may be called ) lightly!

The Visuddhimagga definition indicates that philological considerations have had too big a say. In fact it boils down to this: the Suttas tell us that the arahat has no *upādāna* whatsoever whilst non-arahats have *upādāna* to some degree or other; now, we are to come to our understanding of this fundamental and vital difference between the arahat and the non arahat **essentially** through philological means.

No doubt, philology is necessary; but it is not the **key** to understanding.

2. Majjimanikāya, Sutta No. 26



jectivity in himself. This discovery, which is also the discovery of arahat-ness, entitles him to the epithet Buddha. Arahat-ness is possible only because this subjectivity, being a parasite on experience, can be destroyed and the structure of experience remain intact. Like every non-arahat, the arahat too intentionally acts, but unlike every non-arahat, his intentions are not guided by *tanhā*. Here again, *tanhā* is a parasite on the structure of intentions; and purely because it is a parasite can it be destroyed and the intentional structure yet remain intact.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, in the Mūlapariyāya Sutta, we find the Buddha teaching us the fundamental mode of experience of the arahat as follows:

“ Monks, whosoever monk is an arahat, a destroyer of the cankers, one who has reached completion, done what was to be done, laid down the burden, achieved his own welfare, utterly destroyed the fetter of ‘being’, one who is released through comprehending rightly, he recognizes earth as earth. By recognizing earth as earth, he does not conceive earth, he does not conceive in earth, he does not conceive from earth, he does not conceive ‘earth is for me’, he does not delight in earth.”<sup>2</sup>

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1. There is a school of psychology—the names usually connected with it being Kulpe, Aach, Michotte Aveling — that speaks of a distinction between willing and desiring, endeavouring and striving. But this has nothing to do with what we have pointed out as being the difference between the arahat’s willing or volition and the non-arahat’s desiring. Psychology uses the word ‘conation’ to cover desiring, striving, endeavouring, aspiring etc. But psychology cannot go beyond the barrier of subjectivity, and so remains within the sphere of *puthujjana* thinking.

2. Yopi so bhikkhave bhikkhu araham khīnāsavo vusitavā katakaraniyo ohitabhāro anuphattasadattho parikkhīnaba vasanyojano sammadaññā vimutto sopi pathaviṃ pathevito abhijānāti. Pathaviṃ pathavito abhiññāya pathaviṃ na maññāti pathaviyā na maññāti pathavito na maññāti pathaviṃ meti na maññāti pathaviṃ nābhinandati. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 1).



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WHAT IS UNPLEASURABLE THAT IS NOT-SELF

As we did in the case of the *puthujjana*, we can schematize the above in the following manner:

- (1) The arahat recognizes X as X (X referring to whatever is being recognized)
- (2) Recognizing X as X, he does not conceive X
- (3) He does not conceive in X
- (4) He does not conceive from X
- (5) He does not conceive 'X is for me'
- (6) He does not delight in X.

Thus an arahat has gone beyond all *maññāna*, i.e. beyond all conceivings of subjectivity. He, the arahat, "does not conceive anything, he does not conceive anywhere, he does not conceive by anything" (*na kinci maññati, na kukinci maññati, na kenaci maññati*)<sup>1</sup> He has "faded out" (*vivajja*) and that only means : 'I' am' has faded out.

As with the *puthujjana* the arahat too has immediate experience—perceives X. But in his reflexive experience he recognizes the immediate experience as impermanent and dependent upon conditions. Just as the *puthujjana* without any deliberate effort wrongly takes the perception as permanent because of the presence of *maññāna*, the arahat without any deliberate effort rightly recognizes the perception to be impermanent because of the absence of *maññāna*. With the absence of *maññāna* there is no 'being'; and that means he is **relieved** from both pleasure and unpleasure, and he lives in perfect **ease**. He has "laid down the burden" (*ohitabhāro*).

But this perception of impermanence in the case of the arahat, it must be very clearly understood, is **not** tied up with the perceptions of unpleasurableness and not-self as it is in the case with the noble disciple. The difference lies in **that which** is seen as impermanent. The noble disciple sees an imperma-

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1. Majjimanikāya, Sutta No. 113.



nence in that which is taken as (my) self, in a **holding**-aggregate; and this makes him see that as unpleasurable and not-self also. But the arahat, though he sees impermanence in his experience, sees no impermanence in anything taken as (my) self, simply because in his experience there is nothing whatever taken as (my) self, he sees impermanence in an aggregate that is **without**-holding (*anupāda*). The triad *anicca - dukkha - anattā* applies to all experience **but** the arahat's, that is to say, it applies to experience incorporating conceivings of subjectivity. To the arahat's experience also *anicca* applies in the sense of impermanence plain and simple; but it is **not** the *anicca* of the triad *anicca-dukkha-anattā*, in **that which** is seen as impermanent in his experience is not the same as that which is seen as impermanent in the triad *anicca-dukkha-anattā*. In other words, the arahat's experience is also *anicca*, but not *dukkha* and *anattā*.

So that, in relation to their root-structural reflexive experiences, we have three situations corresponding to the *puthujjana sekha* (learner) and arahat (*asekha*) which would be as follows:

(1) The *Puthujjana*'s root-structural reflexive experience incorporates conceivings of subjectivity, and not seeing *anicca-dukkha-anattā*, they get conceptually elaborated involuntarily **and** voluntarily as 'This is mine; this am I; this is my self'. His reflexive experience is at all times along this grain.

(2) The *sekha*'s root-structural reflexive experience too incorporates conceivings of subjectivity which involuntarily get conceptually elaborated as 'This is mine; this am I; this is my self'. But he does not **voluntarily accept** the position due to his vision of *anicca-dukkha-anattā*. And when he is developing the path, i.e. when essentially, he is practising right mindfulness-and-awareness, he voluntarily, with understanding, sees things as 'Not, this is mine; not, this am I; not, this is my self', thereby **curbing the tendency** to the conceivings of subjectivity to manifest in the root-structural reflexive experience. His root-structural reflexive experiences therefore given in the form of an ethical imperative '**should not**'. It



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is part regenerate, and part unregenerate. "Monks, whosoever monk is learner, not yet achieved the purpose, abides wishing for the uttermost quietus, he recognizes earth as earth. Recognizing earth as earth, he should not conceive earth, he should not conceive in earth he should not conceive from earth, he should not conceive 'earth is for me', he should not delight in earth".<sup>1</sup> This too we can schematize as follows:

- (1) The *sekha* (learner) recognizes X as, X (X referring to whatever is being recognized).
- (2) Recognizing X as, X he should not conceive X
- (3) He should not conceive in X
- (4) He should not conceive from X
- (5) He should not conceive 'X is for me'
- (6) He should not delight in X

To the extent that the **tendency** to conceivings of subjectivity is still there in the *sekha*'s root-structural reflexive experience even at times of right mindfulness-and-awareness, his experience is still to be classed as *dukkha*. Even though at such a time, with the *sekha*, things are actually not in subjection, they are still **inherently** in subjection. And at the times he does not by an act of will—i.e by right mindfulness-and-awareness—prevent things being actually in subjection, things are in subjection for him.

(3) The arahat's root-structural reflexive experience has no conceivings of subjectivity whatsoever. The tendency (*ānusaya*) has been completely eradicated, and therefore there is neither an involuntary nor voluntary conceptual conceiving of subjectivity. Consequently, the arahat **neither** thinks 'This is mine; this am I; this is myself' **nor** thinks 'Not, this is mine; not, this am I; not, this is my self' whether involuntarily or voluntarily.

Often it is assumed that the arahat's experience—i. e. arahat-

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1. Yopi so bhikave bhikku sekho appattamānaso anuttaram yogakkheman pathayamano viharati, Sopi pathavim pathavito abhijānati. Pathavim pathavito abhiññaya pathavim mamaññi. Pathaviyan mamaññi. Pathavito mamaññi. Pathavim meti mamaññi. Pathavim mabinandi.



ness (or *nibbāna*)—is *anatta*. But this is a wrong assumption; and it is the result of trying to understand the Suttas from the scholarly angle. Such attempts are really attempts at **Verbal** understanding, following the notional way we referred to in Chapter II. However, in these circles, arahat-ness (or *nibbāna*) is never held to be *dukkha* (unpleasurable). (To do so would be preposterous.) Arahatness is notoriously held to be *anattā*. But *anattā* cannot at any time in any way be separated from *dukkha*. To describe an experience as being *anattā* but not *dukkha* is to do violence to the meaning of *anattā* by tearing it away from *dukkha*. If a thing is *dukkha* it is also *anattā* and *anicca*, though a thing can be *anicca* in the plain sense of impermanent, but not *dukkha* and not *anatta*, as it is the case with the arahat's experience. Actually, what is done is that *anatta* is torn away from *dukkha* and given the distorted and easy-to-comprehend meaning of 'without a permanent (or everlasting) entity'. After all, in the arahat there is no permanent entity; So the arahat must obviously be *anattā*! But then why only in the arahat? Even in the *puthujjana* there is no permanent entity. And do we need a Buddha to point this out to us?

The unfortunate thing is that arahat-ness (or *nibbāna*) is in this fashion wrongly held to be *anattā* even when mere scholarship devoid of any proper understanding of the four noble truths can see that it cannot be *anattā*. The Buddha says.... "Matter.....feeling.....perception.....determinations.....consciousness, monks, is not-self. If, monks, this consciousness were self, then consciousness would not lead to affliction, and one would obtain of consciousness, 'Let my consciousness be thus, let my consciousness not be thus'. As indeed, monks, consciousness is not-self, so consciousness leads to affliction, and it is not obtained of consciousness, 'Let my consciousness be thus, let my consciousness not be thus'."<sup>1</sup> Now arahat-ness is also a living ex-

1. Rūpa....vedanā....saññā....sankhārā....viññānaṃ bhikkhave anattā. Viññānaṃ hidam bhikkhave attā abhaviṣṣa nayidaṃ viññānaṃ ābādhāya samvatteyya, labbhettha ca viññāne, evaṃ me viññānaṃ hotu, evaṃ me viññānaṃ mā ahoṣīti. Yaṃ mā ca kho bhikkhave viññānaṃ anattā tasmā viññānaṃ ābādhāya samvattati, na ca labbhati viññāne, evaṃ me viññānaṃ hotu, evaṃ me viññānaṃ mā ahoṣīti.  
(Mahāvagga I, Pancavaggiyakathā).



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perience, and so it is still a case of matter, feeling, perception, determinations and consciousness, though there is no holding whatsoever. That being so, we are justified in replacing consciousness (or matter, or feeling, or perception, or determinations) in this Sutta passage with arahat-ness, and seeing what happens. But if we do so, we will have the following situation: "Arahat-ness, monks, is not-self. If monks, this arahat-ness were self, then arahat-ness would not lead to affliction, and one would obtain of arahat-ness, 'Let my arahat-ness be thus, let my arahat-ness not be thus'. As indeed, monks, arahat-ness is not-self, so arahat-ness lead to affliction, and it is not obtained of arahat-ness, 'Let my arahat-ness be thus, let my arahat-ness not be thus' " The absurdity is only too obvious, even from the point of view of scholarship. To say that arahat-ness (or *nibbāna*) is *attā* (self) is to think that one can alter one's individual arahat-ness to suit one's taste—a very curious idea indeed. But to say that arahat-ness is *anattā* (not-self), in the haste to correct the mistaken view that arahat-ness is *attā*, is merely to assert, that arahat-ness leads to affliction. So there is an escape out of the frying-pan, but only to fall into the fire.

Another reason for this confused state of affairs seems to be the failure to realise how vital is the distinction between the five-holding-aggregates (*pancupādānakkhandha*) and the five aggregates (*pancakkhandha*). The Sutta regarding *attā* and *anattā* quoted above was first preached to the five monks at the Deer Park in Benares; and at the time it was preached each of the five monks was a five-holding-aggregates. Though the wording of the Sutta omits the words *upādāna* (holding) when referring to each of the aggregates individually, it is quite clear that holding was implied. After all the five monks were yet holding; they were yet individually a five-holding-aggregates. If they were not holding there was indeed nothing to tell them. And the Sutta further tells us that after this doctrine regarding self and not self was preached to them the Buddha went on to explain to them *anicca-dukkha-anattā*, and that when the Buddha finished it "the minds of the five monks were



released from the cankers by not holding ". (pancavaggiyanam bhikkhunam anupādāya asavehiccittam vimuccimsu).<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately this error—that is the assumption of *anattā* being applicable to arahat-ness also—does not stop at this point. Just as it must, it rebounds elsewhere too. And coupled with another serious error—the mistaking *sankhārā* for *sankhata*—it brings about a state of affairs that very effectively indeed prevents a proper understanding of the Buddha's Teaching.

What happens is this:

He finds the Buddha to have said that "all determinations are impermanent" (*sabbe sankhārā aniccā*) and that "all determinations are unpleasurable" (*sabbe sankhārā dukkhā*) and that "all things are not-self" (*sabbe dhammā anattā*). The question arises in him why in this triad the Buddha did not use the word *sankhārā* (determinations) in reference to *anattā* as he did in reference to *anicca* and *dukkha*. Now he has already wrongly assumed that *sankhārā* refers to what actually *sankhata* refers to i. e. to the "determined" or the "conditioned". He therefore thinks that in this dyad the Buddha meant that all determined things are impermanent and unpleasurable. And that settles *anicca* and *dukkha* for him. What now about the use of the word *dhamma* in reference to *anattā*? Here, *dhamma* means "things". So he comes up with the idea that the word *dhamma* is used in order to cover things that are both determined **and** not-determined. But the not-determined has been defined by the Buddha as arahat-ness. So he thinks that "all things are not-self." was said in order to indicate that the experience of the non-arahat and the arahat are **both** not-self.

We may point out that these grave errors can and **do** lead to mysticism. That is why in books upholding these erroneous views we find a surreptitious resort to mysticism as a way out of the resultant difficulties. The resort to mysticism becomes necessary simply because these errors create unsurmountable difficulties.

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1. Mahāvagga I, Pancavaggiyakathā.



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Now, as we said earlier, the perception of impermanence in the case of the arahat is not bound with the perception of unpleasurableness and not-selfness. The arahat perceives impermanence, and he makes impermanent use of impermanent things, but he neither perceives nor feels any unpleasurableness. The arahat no longer conceives the conceits 'I' and 'mine'. 'This am I' or 'I am such and such' is utterly extinct. He is one in whom "the conceit '(I) am' is abandoned, with root cut off, dug up, made non-existent, is of the nature of not arising in the future."<sup>1</sup>

When the conceits 'I' and 'mine' are no longer conceived, then there is also no longer anything being 'I', 'mine' or 'self'. All forms of holding then vanish. "Friend, there is indeed in the Auspicious One an eye. The Auspicious One sees forms with the eye. But, in the Auspicious One there is no desire-and-lust. With mind fully released is the Auspicious One."<sup>2</sup> When all holding vanishes those things dependent upon holding also vanish. *Dukkha* is completely extinct, for its "root is cut off" (*chinnamūla*); and the root that is cut off is holding. The Buddha tells Sāriputta that this, in brief, is his Teaching.

"Sāriputta, I may indeed preach the Dhamma<sup>3</sup> in brief; Sāriputta, I may indeed preach the Dhamma in detail; Sāriputta, I may indeed preach the Dhamma both in brief and in detail; it is those who understand that are hard to find."

"Now is the time, Auspicious One, now is the time, Well-farer, for the Auspicious One to preach the Dhamma in brief, to preach the Dhamma in detail, to preach the Dhamma both in brief and in detail. There will be those who understand the

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1. Asmimāno pahīno hoti ucchinnamūlo tālavatthukato anabhāvakato āyatim anuppādadhammo. (Anguttaranikāya, III, Pancakanipāta, Yodhājīvavagga, Sutta No. 1).

2. Samvijjati kho āvuso Bhagavato cakkhu, passati Bhagavā cakkhunā rūpaṃ, chandarāgo Bhagavato natthi. Suvimuttacitto Bhagavā. Samyuttanikāya IV, Salāyatanaṣaṃyutta, Samuddavagga, Sutta No. 5)

3. Dhamma here refers to the Buddha's Teaching.



Dhamma." "Then, Sāriputta, thus must you train yourself: Were there in this body having consciousness no latent tendencies to the conceits of 'I'—making and 'mine'-making, were there in all external indications no latent tendencies to the conceits of 'I'-making and 'mine'-making, were there in the abiding in the attainment of that mind's release, or release through understanding, no latent tendencies to the conceits of 'I'-making and 'mine'-making, I shall abide in the attainment of that mind's release, of that release through understanding. Thus, Sāriputta, must you train yourself."

"In so far indeed as a monk, Sāriputta, has in this body having consciousness no latent tendencies to the conceits of 'I'-making and 'mine'-making, has in all external indications no latent tendencies to the conceits of 'I'-making and 'mine'-making, abides in the attainment of that mind's release, of that release through understanding, in the abiding of which attainment of the mind's release, of release through **understanding**, there are no latent tendencies to the conceits of 'I'—making and 'mine'-making—such a monk, Sāriputta, has cut off craving, has broken the bonds, has by right comprehension of conceit made an end of *dukkha*."<sup>1</sup>

1. Sankhittenapi kho ahaṃ Sāriputta dhammaṃ deseyyaṃ vitthārenapi kho ahaṃ Sāriputta dhammaṃ deseyyaṃ sankhittavitthārenapi kho ahaṃ Sāriputta dhammaṃ deseyyaṃ aññātāro ca dullabhāti.

Etassa Bhagavā kālo etassa Sugata kālo, yaṃ Bhagava sankhittenapi dhammaṃ deseyyaṃ vitthārenapi dhammaṃ deseyyaṃ sankhittavitthārenapi dhammaṃ deseyyaṃ, bhavissanti dhammassa aññātāroti.

Tasmātiha Sāriputta evaṃ sikkhitabbaṃ: imasmiṃ ca saviññānake kyāe ahankāramamaṃkāramānānusaya na bhavissanti, bahiddhā va sabbanimittesu ahankāramamaṃkāramānānusaya na bhavissanti, yaṃ ca cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ upasampajja viharato ahankāramamaṃkāramānānusaya na honti, tam ca cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ upasampajja viharissāmāti. Evaṃ hi vo Sāriputta sikkhitabbaṃ.

Yato ca kho Sāriputta bhikkhuno imasmiṃ ca saviññānake kāye ahankāramamaṃkāramānānusaya na honti, bahiddhā ca sabbanimittesu ahankāramamaṃkāramānānusaya na honti, tam ca cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ upasampajja viharato ahankāramamaṃkāramānānusaya na honti, tam ca cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ upasampajja viharati. Ayaṃ vuccati Sāriputta bhikkhu acchecchi tanhaṃ, vāvattayi saṃyojanaṃ, sammā mānābhisamayā, antamakāsi dukkhassa. (Anguttaranikāya I, Tikanipāta, Devadūtavagga, Sutta No. 3).



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But the *puthujjana* does not see all this; he cannot conceive experience other than as an experience concerning a subject 'I'. Nor does he see that there can be intentional action, but no craving; that experience can be teleological but without being appropriated; that things can be **significant** but without being 'mine'. And he remains a *puthujjana* precisely because he does not see.

Developing *aniccasaññā*, *dukkhasaññā* and *anattasaññā* is practising the Buddha's Teaching in its most essential form; in the strict sense of the word, this task is performed by the noble disciple only, for it is the noble disciple only that has acquired these three perceptions. The arahat does not do this, for the reason that he no longer perceives his experience as *anicca dukkha anattā*. He, the arahat, no more **develops** the Teaching, there is no necessity for it; the Teaching has no use for him any further; it is something of the past for him. That is why the Buddha said, "Monks, I shall preach to you the Dhamma likening it to a raft for crossing over, not for retaining".<sup>1</sup>

In our introductory Chapter we pointed out that the existentialist keeps asking question about self and the world; but though he sees that no answer is justifiable, being a *puthujjana*, he has no option but to keep asking them. He sees a 'self' which is not a self and together with it a world which forever eludes his comprehension. He can raise the questions but he can find no justifiable answers. Beyond this point of frustration he cannot go. The Buddha also does not answer questions about self and the world. But he shows us how to get beyond them by giving us his Teaching that is **beyond the world** (*lokuttara*). All these questions are determinations that determine *dukkha*. They upbringing worry, anxiety, agitation, fear, doubt, and whatever other unpleasurable things there be. If *dukkha* is to cease these questions must also cease. In pointing out to us the cessation of *dukkha* the Buddha points out to us

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1. Majjhimanikāya Sutta No. 22.



the cessation of all existential questions about self and the world. He who understands his Teaching neither asks these questions nor seeks answers to them; for he sees that all these questions are invalid, and seeking answers to them is only going after a deception as the deer goes after the 'water' when it sees the sun shining upon the sand. And whatever views there be that are adopted in answer to these questions—these also he sees to be of the same unjustifiable nature. They are one and all, "with unpleasure, with distress, with despair, with fever" (*sadukkham savighatam saupayasam saparilaham*).<sup>1</sup> In the arahat, in whom no *dukkha* can arise any more, these questions no more arise. For these questions to arise notions of 'I', 'mine' and 'self' must arise; and in the arahat no notions whatever of 'I', 'mine' and 'self' arise. For him 'self' is extinguished (*nibbuti*), and with it is also extinguished its inseparable correlative—'my world'. So long as he lives there is a 'world' in that there are six senses, sense objects, consciousness, etc. But it is not a world that concerns an 'I' or a 'self'; it is no longer the correlative of an 'I' or a 'self'. The arahat, has "gone beyond the world" (*param gata loka*).<sup>2</sup> In him the existential ambiguity has been brought to an end; for him, there is not even the trace of an ambiguity any more, for the source of the ambiguity—the conceit 'I am'—has been removed never more to arise again.

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1. Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 7

2. Livuttaka, Sutta No. 96.



## CHAPTER XI

### BIRTH, AGEING AND DEATH

In the arahat all determinations that determine *dukkha* have ceased, including those most important ones which drive the individual into authenticity, and finally into seeking the assistance of the Buddha's Teaching, viz., birth, ageing and death. He seeks this assistance with the fervent hope: "I am beset with birth, ageing, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair, beset with unpleasure, come to unpleasure; perhaps a putting an end to this whole mass of unpleasure may be discerned."<sup>1</sup> For this reason it is necessary that we pay special attention to this problem of birth, ageing and death, and see how the problem has been solved in the case of the arahat.

As Siddhartha, before he left his home, the Buddha said that he led a very luxurious life. "Monks, I was delicately nurtured, exceedingly delicately nurtured, delicately nurtured beyond measure. For instance, in my father's house lotus pools were made thus: one of blue lotuses, another of red lotuses, another of white lotuses just for my benefit. No sandalwood powder did I use that was not from Kasi; of Kasi cloth was my turban made; of Kasi cloth was my jacket; of Kasi cloth was my cloak. Monks, by night and day a white canopy was held over me, lest cold or heat, dust or chaff or dew should touch me. Moreover, monks, I had three mansions: one for the winter, one for the summer, and one for the rainy season. In the four months of the rains, monks, I, waited on by my minstrels—women all of them—did not come down from my mansion in those months. Monks, whereas in other men's homes broken

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1. *Otinno'mhi patiya jaraya maranena paridevohi dukkhehi domanassehi upayasehi dukkhotinno dukkhapareto; appeva imassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa antakiriya pannayethati. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 67).*



rice together with sour gruel is given as food to slave-servants, in my father's home they were given rice, meat and milk-rice for the food."<sup>1</sup> But living this life, luxurious as it was, he realised, was only a seeking for what was liable to birth, ageing, death, sorrow, etc. "I too, monks, before awakening, while I was still a *bodhisatta*,<sup>2</sup> not fully awakened, being myself subject to birth, sought what was likewise subject to birth; being myself subject to ageing, sought what was likewise subject to ageing; being myself subject to ill.....being myself subject to dying.....being myself subject to sorrow.....being myself subject to defilement, sought what was likewise subject to defilement."<sup>3</sup> Then, he said, it occurred to him as follows: "Suppose that I, being myself subject to birth, having seen the misery in what is subject to birth, were to seek the not-born, uttermost quietus of extinction; being myself subject to ageing... seek the not-ageing.....; being myself subject to dying.....seek the not-dying.....; being myself subject to sorrow.....seek the not-sorrowing.....; being myself subject to defilement, having seen the misery in what is subject to defilement, were to seek

1. *Sukhumālo ahaṃ bhikkhave paramasukhumālo accantasukhumālo. Mama sudan bhikkhave pitunivesane pokkharaniyo kārītū honti. Ekattha sudan uppalaṃ pupphati, ekattha padumaṃ, ekattha pundarikam, yāvadeva mamatthāya. Na kho pañassahaṃ bhikkhave akāsikaṃ candanaṃ dāremi. Kāsikaṃ su me taṃ bhikkhave vethanaṃ hoti, kāsikā kancukā, kāsikaṃ nivāsanaṃ, kāsiko uttarāsango. Rattindivaṃ kho pañassu me taṃ bhikkhave setacchattaṃ dāriyati mā naṃphusi sītaṃ vā unhaṃ vā rajo vā tinaṃ vā ussavo vāti. Tassa mayhaṃ bhikkhave tayo pāsādā ahesuṃ, eko hemantiko, eko gimhiko eko vassiko. So kho ahaṃ bhikkhave vassike pāsāde vassike cattāro māse nippurisehi turīyehi parivāriyamano na hetthā-pāsādaṃ orohāmi. Yatha kho pana bhikkhave aññesaṃ nivesānesu dāsakammakaraṇisassa kanājakam bhojanaṃ deyati bilangadutiyaṃ, evamevassu me bhikkhave pitunivasane dāsakammakaraṇisassa sālīmaṃ sodano diyaṃ. I, Tikaṇipāta, Devatāvagga, Sutta No. 9).*

2. *Bodhisatta* means 'the one who will be a Buddha'.

3. *Ahaṃpi sudan bhikkhave pubbeva sambodhā anabhisambuddho bodhisattova samāno attanā jātiddhammo samāno jātiddhammaññeva pariyesāmi; attanā jarāddhammo samāno jarāddhammaññeva pariyesāmi; attanā byādhi dhammo samāno . . . . . attanā maranadhammo samāno . . . . . attanā sokadhammosamāno . . . . . attanā sankilesadhammo samāno sankilesadhammaññeva pariyesāmi. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 26).*



the not-defiling; uttermost quietus of extinction."<sup>1</sup> And so, in order that he might carry out his search, he left his luxurious home: "Then I, monks, after some time, being young, hair jet-black, of radiant youth, in the prime of life, (my) unwilling father and mother with tearful faces, crying, having cut off (my) hair and beard, having put on yellow robes, went forth from home to homelessness."<sup>2</sup> And later on, after an inconceivable struggle,<sup>3</sup> he achieved what he sought: "So I, monks, being myself subject to birth, having seen the misery in what is subject to birth, seeking the not-born, uttermost quietus of extinction, reached the not-born, uttermost quietus of extinction; being myself subject to ageing, having seen the misery of what is subject to ageing, seeking the not-ageing, uttermost quietus of extinction, reached the not-ageing, uttermost quietus of extinction; being myself subject to ill, having seen the misery of what is subject to ill, seeking the not-ill, uttermost quietus of extinction, reached the not-ill, uttermost quietus of extinction; being myself subject to death, seeking the not-dying, uttermost quietus of extinction, reached the not-dying, uttermost quietus of extinction; being myself subject to sorrow.....; being myself subject to defilement, having seen the misery of what is subject to defilement seeking the not-defiling, uttermost quietus of extinction, reached the not-defiling, uttermost quietus of extinction. Knowledge and vision arose in me: Unshakable is

1. *Yannūnāhaṃ attanā jātidhammo samāno jātidhamme ād,navam veditvā ajātaṃ anuttaraṃ yogakkhemaṃ nibbānaṃ pariyeseyyaṃ; attanā jarādhammo samāno. . . ajaram pariyeseyyaṃ; attanā byādh,dhammo samāno ..... abyādhim .... pariyeseyyaṃ; attanā maranadhammo samāno .... amataṃ ... pariyeseyyaṃ; attanā sokadhamm-samāno . . . . asokaṃ . . . . pariyeseyyaṃ; attanāsa nkilesadhammo samāno sankilesaodhamme ād,navam veditvā asankilitthaṃ anuttaraṃ yogakkhemaṃ nibbānaṃ pariyeseyyanti. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 26).*

2. *So kho ahaṃ bhikkhave āparena samayena daharova samāno susukālakeso badhrena yobbanene samannāgato patamena vayasā akāmakānaṃ mātāpitunnaṃ assumukhānaṃ. rudantānaṃ, kesamassuṃ ohāretvā kāsāyāni vatthāni acchādetvā agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajim. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No.26).*

3. The Buddha's own description of this struggle is given in the *Majjhimanikāya* a Sutta No. 26 and Sutta No. 36.



my release; this is the end of birth; now there is no more 'being'.<sup>1</sup> Thus the Buddha claimed that he attained the not-born (*ajataṃ*) the not-ageing (*ajaraṃ*), and the not-dying (*amataṃ*).

Nevertheless the *puthujjana* sees the Buddha and the arahat ageing and dying in the same manner he sees the others. He also sees that they were born.

What then is the difference in it all?

It would perhaps make things easier if we deal with the question of ageing first.

The definition of ageing given by the Buddha himself is as follows:

"The ageing, the decaying, the brokenness, the greying, the wrinkledness, the dwindling of life, the decrepitude of the faculties, of this and that creature in this and that order of creatures—this is called ageing."<sup>2</sup>

In the above definition, the important thing is that ageing is defined in relation to 'creatures'. The Pali word is *satta*. And as we said earlier, *satta* (creature) refers to the five-holding-aggregates, and it is further defined for us as follows:

"That desire, that lust, that delight, that craving, towards matter.....towards feeling,..... towards perception.....towards

1. *So kho ahaṃ bhikkhave attanā jātiddhammo samāno jātiddhamme ād,navam veditvā ajātaṃ anuttaram yoggakkhemam nibbānaṃ pariyesamāno ajātaṃ anuttaram yoggakkhemam nibbānaṃ ajjhangamaṃ; attanā jarāddhammo samāno jarāddhamme ādinavam veditvā ajaraṃ anuttaram yoggakkhemam nibbānaṃ pariyesamāno ajaraṃ anuttaram yoggakkhemam nibbānaṃ ajjhangamaṃ; attanā byādhidhammo samāno byādhidhamme ādinavam veditvā abyādhim anuttaram yoggakkhemam nibbānaṃ pariyesamāno abyādhim anuttaram yoggakkhemam nibbānaṃ ajjhangamaṃ; attanā maranadhammo samāno maranadhamme ād,navam veditvā amataṃ anuttaram yoggakkhemam nibbānaṃ pariyesamāno amataṃ anuttaram yoggakkhemam nibbānaṃ ajjhangamaṃ; attanā sokadhammo samāno . . . ; attanā sankilesāddhammo samāno saneilesadhamma ād,navam veditvā asankilittam anuttaram yoggakkhemam nibbānaṃ pariyesamāno asankilittam anuttaram yoggakkhemam nibbānaṃ ajjhangamaṃ. Nānanco pana me dassanam udapādi: akuppā me vimutti, ayamantimā jāti, hatthidāni punabbhavo ti. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 26).*

2. *Yā tesam tesam sattānam tamhi tamhi sattanikāye jarā jirabatā khandiccam pāliccam valittavatā āyuno samhāni indriyānam paripāko, ayam vuccati jarā. (Samyuttanikāya II, Abhisamayasaṃyutta, Buddhavagga, Sutta No. 2).*



determinations.....towards consciousness,—the hanging therein, the clinging therein, therefore it is said ‘creature’.”<sup>1</sup>

Ageing, then, means the ageing of the sense faculties (or the sense organs) considered as ‘I’. It is the **concept** that the *puthujjana* has with regard to a particular change that goes on in his faculties. It is his **view** regarding the change, and this view is always associated with unpleasure. And it is unpleasurable because it is an **unwelcome** change to ‘**my** faculties’, or to faculties that are what ‘I’ **am**, that are ‘my self’.

The point here is that to the *puthujjana* it is not a change which he sees as just a change to a thing pure and simple. It is a change to a thing that is ‘for me’, ‘for my self’. And a change ‘for me’ must, whenever it is perceived and known, be either welcome or not welcome, be either determining pleasure or determining unpleasure. A change to the sense faculties is conceived as a change for the better or for the worse **only if** it is conceived as a change to that which ‘I **am**’. It is very important that this is seen. The *puthujjana* designates it as ageing or decaying only because it is an unwelcome change, a **manifestly unpleasurable** change, a change which when perceived by him determines unpleasure for him. The perception of the change to the thing **pure and simple** is not unpleasurable; it is the (unpleasant) mental feeling that is **always** determined by his perception of this change as a change to that which is ‘I’ that makes the change manifestly unpleasurable for him.

We can understand this by way of desire too.

To the *puthujjana* the six sense organs are a means by which he satisfies his desire (*chanda*) - a desire that is dependent upon his *tanhā*. This is the significance these faculties have for him. When they have changed to what he calls aged or decayed, they no longer permit him to derive the **same** degree of satisfaction of his desire, which desire, unfortunately, still remains

1. *Rūpe . . . . . vedanāya . . . . . saññāya . . . . . sankhāresu . . . . . viññāne yo chando ye rāgo yā nandī yā tanhā tatra satto tatra visatto tasmā satto ti vuccati.* (*Saṃyutta-nikāya III, Rādhasaṃyutta, Sutta No. 2*)



in him as strong as it ever was. (The ageing complacent *puthujjana* sometimes thinks that his desire has reduced. Nothing of the kind. The fundamental desire—i.e. the desire for 'I am'—still remains in him as strong as it ever was.) The perception of this state of affairs regarding himself determines unpleasure for him. And so he considers the faculties, which he identifies as 'my self', as having **aged** or grown **old** or **decayed**. (The maggot that is waiting for the body to grow old and decay and die in order that it may have a feast would not consider the changing body as ageing or decaying. On the contrary it might view it as changing for the better, and might derive pleasure at perceiving the change.) Further, this perception of ageing is invariably associated with the perception of death as being close at hand. That is possibly why we so often find ageing and death being coupled together in the Suttas—*jarāmarana* (ageing-and-death).

As against this, the arahat has done away with desire. Consequently, to the arahat, the sense faculties do not have the same significance they have for the *puthujjana*. To the arahat, it is just faculties; they are no longer things that concern an 'I' or 'self'. Not having desire, when the faculties change, the perception of this change does **not** determine any unpleasure. He does not lament and grieve at it as the *puthujjana* does. The faculties have changed; the change is perceived, and that is all. **This change is not ageing (*jarā*) to him.**

That is why arahat-ness is described as not-ageing (*ajaram*).

This explanation of the arahat's not-ageing that we have given above is at the more explicit level, by way of desire. At the level of the root-structure, wherein the arahat is said to be not- 'existing' or not- 'being', the position is that, consequently, there are no faculties 'existing' for him, and therefore no faculties **to change**. It is necessary that we see this state of affairs at this basic level too.

In the *Upasena Sutta* we have the case of a serpent having fallen on the body of the monk Upasena, and presumably stung him. Upasena requested the monks nearby to lift his body on to a couch and take it outside so that it may break



up there (as life ends). He was then told by the monks that no change (for the worse) in his faculties necessitating such action was evident. Upasena then replied as follows: "Friend Sāriputta, to whom there is thus: 'I am the eye' or 'The eye is mine' or 'I am the tongue' or 'The tongue is mine' or 'I am the mind' or 'The mind is mine'—to him, friend Sāriputta, there is a difference to body or a change in faculties. To me indeed, friend Sāriputta, there is not thus: 'I am the eye' or 'The eye is mine' or 'I am the tongue' or 'The tongue is mine' or 'I am the mind' or 'The mind is mine'. What difference to body or change in faculties is there for me then, friend Sāriputta?"<sup>1</sup>

The Sutta says that Upasena was one who "had long since fully removed the latent tendencies to the conceits of 'I'-making and 'mine'-making" (*dīgharattaṃ ahankāramamṃakāramānānusaya susamuhata*), which means he was an arahat.

Now, what the arahat Upasena said was in reference to the root-structure of the arahat's experience wherein the arahat is described as not-'existing' or not-'being' (*abhūtam*). With the arahat there is no **subject** no 'I', no 'self'. When there is no subject, then there are no faculties **for a subject**; and when there are no faculties for a subject, there are no faculties 'existing',—i.e. there is no 'I **am** these faculties'. For the faculties to 'exist' they must be identified with a subject with an 'I', with a 'self'. The faculties have to be appropriated, which means they have to be taken as being identical with 'I' or 'my self'; they have to be stamped with the concept 'I', and **thereby** be (falsely) assumed as things that **persist in time without change**, as things that are **permanent**, as things that **exist**. And a change to them will be a

1. *Tassa nuna āvuso Sāriputta evaṃ assa ahaṃ cakkhanti mama cakkhanti vā ahaṃ jivhāṇi vā mama jivhāṇi vā ahaṃ mano ti vā manoti vā tassa āvuso Sāriputta siyā kāyassa vā aññathattaṃ indriyānaṃ vā parināmo. Mayhañca kho āvuso Sāriputta na evaṃ hoti ahaṃ cakkhanti vā mama cakkhanti vā ahaṃ jivhāṇi vā mama jivhāṇi vā ahaṃ manoti vā mama manoti vā. Tassa mayhaṃ āvuso Sāriputta kim kāyassa vā annathattaṃ bhavissati indriyānaṃ vā viparināmoti. (Saṃyuttanikāya VI, vā aññathattaṃ bhavissati indriyānaṃ vā viparināmoti. (Saṃyuttanikāya IV, Salāyatana-saṃyutta, Migajālavagga, Sutta No. 7).*



matter of concern only because that change will be perceived as a change to something that has been so assumed as a permanent or never changing **self**. In the arahat there is no appropriation; hence no 'existence', no 'being'; hence nothing (falsely) permanent that is to change later, either for the better or for the worse. The arahat perceives change; but he does not perceive a change to something (falsely) assumed to be a permanent or never changing self as the *puthujjana* perceives. **This** (i.e. the arahat's) perception of impermanence or change is therefore **not** unpleasurable. In other words, it does not determine unpleasure, because it is **not** the perception of the impermanence of a 'self', because it is not the perception of a change to a 'being', whether that 'being' is the 'being-faculties' or anything else. When the monks questioned Upasena, their question implied a change to 'being', and in this case to a 'being-faculties'. And Upasena said that there is for him no such change, simply because there is for him no such 'being'.<sup>1</sup> The *puthujjana* on the other hand, in his innermost being, subtly and falsely perceives or assumes a never-changing self, and then he sees manifest a change in that which he had falsely taken to be such self. Thus there is in him a perpetual contradiction, there is an ambiguity for him—an existential ambiguity—; and it is an ambiguity that determines unpleasure. "In the cognized there shall be just the cognized" (*viññate viññātamattam bhavissati*) is not something applicable

1. Even at the risk of being called repetitive we have to drive this point in; we have to bring up rather often this matter of the arahat not—'being'. It is so vital; and if it is missed then the Buddha's Teaching is also missed. Philosophers—particularly existential philosophers—say that the primordial question of philosophy is to ask the meaning of Being, and by Being they of course refer to 'being' (*bhava*); they cannot refer to anything else, though of course they will invariably have wrong views regarding it. But to see Being ('being') one must see the cessation of Being ('being') and only the Buddha shows us how—and that too, after he himself experienced cessation of Being ('being').

This does not of course mean, nor does it follow, that all philosophers interested in the question of Being ('being') are going to follow the Buddha's Teaching. *Kāmatanhā* and *bhavatanhā* are not easy things to cause cracks in.



to the *puthujjana*, or within his grasp. There is, for him, always something **more** involved. So that the change that he cognizes is not just a change to something pure and simple, but a change to something he tacitly assumes to be unchanging by his identifying it as 'I' or 'my self'.

So that, when there are no faculties 'existing', then there are no 'existing' faculties to change and so cause concern. And when there are no 'existing' faculties to change causing concern, then there is no ageing. Thus, arahatness is a not-ageing (*ajaram*).

The whole point is that though the faculties—eye, ear, nose, etc.—change for the arahat, this change is not a change that determine unpleasure. Thus the change is not 'ageing' **for him**. The arahat's hair goes grey, the skin gets wrinkled, the teeth fall, etc. just as with a non-arahat. But whilst for the non-arahat all this is 'ageing' or 'decay', it is not so for the arahat. For the arahat it is just a change which has no unpleasurable significance whatsoever, and therefore in **his** case, it is not to be called by such words as 'ageing' and 'decaying'. These words always signify unpleasurableness; and since there is nothing perceived or felt unpleasurable in the arahat's experience, these words are not used in reference to the arahat.

We may now proceed to the question of birth and death.

Now, unlike ageing (*jarā*), birth (*jāti*) and death (*marana*) are not occurrences that the *puthujjana* can presently experience. He neither experiences his birth nor even recollects it; and he has no experience of his death, though he can have experience of what is called approaching death. But the Buddha says, "Birth is unpleasurable" (*jātipi dukkhā*)<sup>1</sup> and "Death is unpleasurable" (*maranampi dukkham*)<sup>2</sup>. If however, the *puthujjana* does not **now** experience his own birth and death, what 'birth' and 'death' does he **now** experience as being unpleasurable?

1. *Mahāvagga, Pancavaggiyakathā, Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta.*

2. *Ibid.*



The answer is:

The *puthujjana* sees **others** being born and dying. For him this is a matter of **immediate** seeing. So he comes to the conclusion that he also was born and that he also will die. He thinks 'I was born' and 'I will die'. This is all that birth and death mean to him during his conscious existence. It is this **thinking** of his birth and death that is a **present** unpleasurableness to him, and not the actual events of his birth and death. He can experience only **thoughts** regarding birth and death; even the experience of what is called approaching death is a thinking of death, with the difference that there is very much more anxiety since death is thought to be actually imminent. It is for these reasons that Kierkegaard asks whether "it follows as a consequence that death is only when it is not."<sup>1</sup> This thinking of his own past birth (as **this** 'being' with whatever the unsatisfactory features there be in it) and his own future death (for which he always has some fear and anxiety) goes on right through his life whenever he reflects upon himself. "Things have mind as forerunner, mind as chief, are mind made" (*manopubbangamā dhammā manosetthā manomayā*).<sup>2</sup> What drove Siddhartha out of his palatial residences at the age of twenty-nine was not the actual event of this birth or of a death but the **thought** of his past birth and of a death to come.

Now, within the unity of our existential structure, ideas of birth and death can be considered as subordinate to ideas of 'being'. The *puthujjana* thinks: I **exist**, I **am**: and I **am** in essentially the same way as I **was born**; and **as born** I am liable to **die**.

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1. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 150. See also Kierkegaard's statement regarding death and thoughts of death quoted by us in Chapter 1.
  2. *Dhammapada*, Verse 1. As should appear from the comments we have made, this verse in the *Dhammapada* embraces in its orbit a far wider range than it is generally reckoned. Quite understandably it has been given first precedence in this collection of verses inasmuch as the *Mulāpariyāya Sutta* has been given first precedence in the collection of medium length discourses called the *Majjhimanikāya*.



The *puthujjana* finds that this 'my self' **was born** and **will be dying** as essentially the same as it **is now**. In other words, he **now** has thoughts regarding his birth and death because he **now** finds himself to be a self in his own eyes. So that, the *puthujjana*, reflecting upon his **present** existence, sees a 'self' which he refers to as 'my self'; and he thinks as follows: This my self which I **now** see when I reflect is the same as **was** born in the past, and, as it **was** born it **will** be dying in the future.'

The existentialist says: "For finally this foetus **was** me; represents the factual limit for my memory but not the theoretical limit of my past. There is a metaphysical problem concerning birth in that I can be anxious to know how I happened to have been born from that **particular** embryo."<sup>1</sup> Thus to the existentialist too, birth (more precisely, thinking of birth) is an anxiety-determining thing; but, being a *puthujjana*, he does not see that it is because he tacitly assumes an I that has been a permanent-by-itself at least from birth, which is as far as his memory goes. Actually when he speaks of an I that happened to have been born from a particular embryo, he tacitly assumes that, that same I existed even before its inception in the said, embryo, the ultimate implication of this itself being that I had been existing in the eternal past. In fact the phrase "not the theoretical limit of my past" indicates the presence of this implication. Note also that thoughts concerning birth can be anxiety-determining, which means unpleasure-determining: "I can be **anxious** to know how I happen to have been born....."

Unless **present** experience is in some way or other reckoned as concerning a self the question of a 'was born' and a 'dying' cannot arise. The *puthujjana* is concerned with a birth **only because** he sees a 'self' to which birth and death apply. In

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1. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* p. 139.

Sartre adds that "this problem is perhaps insolvable". Certainly it is—without the Buddha's Teaching.



the same manner the *puthujjana* thinks he **existed** yesterday—which only means he thinks he was yesterday this **same** self he now is—he thinks he existed earlier too. And the earliest point of his 'existence' or ('being') for which he sees definite and certain grounds in his birth. Likewise with the future. The last point of his 'existence', in other words the last point in time wherein he can perceive his being this same 'self', is death.

Because in the *puthujjana*'s experience there is manifest a false that-which-stands (*thiti*)—i.e. because in his experience a false self is manifest—there is also manifest an arising (*uppāda*)—i. e. a birth—, and a passing away (*vaya*) i.e. death—, both of which concerns this that-which-stands in his own eyes. In the arahat's experience **such** a that-which-stands is not manifest (*na paññāyati*). When in his experience such a that-which-stands is not manifest, then an arising or a passing away of such a that-which-stand is not manifest. The non-manifestation of such things is a characteristic of the arahat's experience. That is why the arahat is called birth-less (*ajataṃ*) and deathless (*amataṃ*).

“‘I am’—monk, this is a conceiving. ‘This am I’—this is a conceiving. ‘I shall be’—this is a conceiving. ‘I shall not be’—this is a conceiving. ‘I shall be of matter’—this is a conceiving. ‘I shall be of not-matter’—this is a conceiving. ‘I shall be of perception’—this is a conceiving. ‘I shall be of not-perception’—this is a conceiving. ‘I shall be of *nevasaññānāsañña*<sup>1</sup>—this is a conceiving. Conceiving, monk, is a disease; conceiving is an imposthume; conceiving is a barb. When, monk, he has gone beyond all conceiving, the sage is said to be at peace. But, monk, the sage who is at peace is not born, does not decay, is not agitated, does not envy. Monk, for him there is not even that by which he can be born, not being born, how will he decay; not decaying, how will

1. *Nevasaññānāsañña* literally translated, would be neither-perception-nor non-perception. But this rendering could be misleading since the suttas indicate that in the *nevasaññānāsañña* attainment there is perception, though the perception present is so subtle as to be in a class by itself.



he die; not dying, how will he be agitated; not being agitated, how will he envy? ”<sup>1</sup>

That which is, and by which one can be born, grow old, and die, is ‘I’ or ‘self’. But the arahat is completely free from ‘self’. The deception of ‘self’ no more arises in him. “He himself does not perceive ‘self’.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore there is for him nothing that can be referred to as having been born and ageing and dying. Further, as the Sutta passage says, when there is no death to come, then there can be no getting agitated (*kuppati*) whatsoever, and no kind of envying (*pihessati*) anything or anybody. Cessation of ‘being’ (*bhavanirodha*) cannot be agitated or unsteadied or shaken, nor can it have envy. These unpleasurable things—birth, ageing and decay, death, getting agitated, envying, etc.—pertain only to ‘being’. And arahatness as the experience of the cessation of ‘being’ is at one and the same time the experience of the **extinction** of all these unpleasurable things.

Just as the change that goes on in the body of the arahat is not decay for the arahat, the laying down of life (*jīvita pariyādāna*) of the arahat is not death for the arahat. Decay and death **always** imply ‘self’, and for the arahat there is **no** ‘self’. We repeat, decay and death determine unpleasure. In the arahats experience, though change and disappearance are manifest, no decay and death are manifest. These not being manifest, no unpleasure dependent upon such manifesting is determined. In the *Samyuttanikāya II, Bhikkusamyutta, Sutta No. 2*, it is said that no change to anything whatsoever gives

1. *Asmiti bhikkhu maññitaṃ etaṃ; ayaṃ ahaṃ asmiti maññitaṃ etaṃ; bhavissanti maññitaṃ etaṃ, na bhavissanti maññitaṃ etaṃ; rūpi bhavissanti maññitaṃ etaṃ; arūpi bhavissanti maññitaṃ etaṃ; saññi bhavissanti maññitaṃ etaṃ; assaṇi bhavissanti maññitaṃ etaṃ; nevasaññiṇḍsaṇṇi bhavissanti maññitaṃ etaṃ. Maññitaṃ bhikkhu rogo, maññitaṃ gando, maññitaṃ sallāṃ. Sabbamaññitānaṃ tveva bhikkhu samatikkamā muni santo ti vuccati. Muni kho pana bhikkhu santo na jāyati na jiyiyati na kuppati nappiheti. Tam pi assa bhikkhu natthi yena jāyetha ajāyamāno kim jiyvissati, ajiyvissati, amiyvissati, amiyvissati, akuppa-māno kissa pihessati? (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta. No. 140).*

2. *To attanā attanaṃ nānupassati (Suttanipāta, Verse 477).*



rise to sorrow, lamentation, unpleasure, grief and despair in Sariputta—not even the passing away of the Teacher (i.e. the Buddha)—, and this because he has entirely uprooted the latent tendencies to the conceits of 'I'-making and 'mine'-making.

It should be quite clearly understood that the Buddha did not declare that he **will** be experiencing deathlessness after his life is over. He said that he, likewise the arahats, **live experiencing** deathlessness. Exhorting the five monks at Benares (to whom he first taught) to listen to him, he described himself thus: "The Tathāgata, monks, is arahat, is all—enlightened. Give, ear, monks. Deathlessness has been reached. I will instruct you."<sup>1</sup> Thus deathlessness is something that **has been attained** by the arahat, or something that **has been achieved** by him. "Having attained it and realised it" (*sacchikatvā upasampajja*) the arahat "lives experiencing it in the body" (*kāyena ca phusitvā viharati*).<sup>2</sup>

The arahat has come to the cessation of birth, ageing and death. He is "entirely freed from birth, ageing and death"—*parimutto jātiyā jarāmaranena*.<sup>3</sup> He "has done away with birth and death"—*pahīnajātīmarano*.<sup>4</sup> He "has gone beyond birth and death"—*jāti marana maccaga*.<sup>5</sup> He is one who "has arrived at the destruction of birth"—*jātikkhayaṃ patto*.<sup>6</sup> He is one who "has conquered death"—*maranabhibhu*.<sup>7</sup> To him applies: "Calm and unclouded, peaceful, freed of longing, he has crossed over birth and ageing, I say"—*santo vidhūmo anīgho nirāso atāri so jātijarantī brūmi ti*.<sup>8</sup> When Ānanda attained arahatness he

1. *Mahāvagga I, Pancavaggiyakathā*.

2. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 70*.

3. *Anguttaranikāya, I, Tikanipāta, Devadutavagga, Sutta No. 8*.

4. *Anguttaranikāya, I, Tikanipāta, Brāhmanavagga, Sutta No. 7*.

5. *Itivuttaka, 77*.

6. *Itivuttaka, 99*.

7. *Theragāthā, Verse 1180*.

8. *Anguttaranikāya I, Tikanipāta, Devadutavagga, Sutta No. 2*.



said of himself: "Gone to the end of birth and death he bears the final frame"—*dhāreti antimaṃ dehaṃ jātīmaranaparāgu*.<sup>1</sup>

The overcoming of death does not mean a living for ever. Death is overcome by **removing** that thing to which death **applies**. The experience of the living arahat is birthless, ageing-less and deathless; and this simply because all subjectivity—i.e. being 'I' or 'self'—to which alone birth, ageing and death are applicable has been completely cut off never to arise again. "This is the deathless; that is to say, the release of the mind **through not**—holding."<sup>2</sup>

Now from the point of view of pure and simple verbal usage, it is not impossible to apply the words 'ageing' and 'death' to the arahat when referring to him in ordinary day-to-day language.<sup>3</sup> But the implications should be very clearly kept in mind, since these two words would then not have the same meaning and significance as when used for anybody else. For this reason it is best not to use these words in reference to the arahat. Note how in the following Sutta passage the words 'born' (*jāti*), 'ageing' (*jarā*) and 'death' (*marāṇa*) are deliberately avoided when speaking of the arahat in comparison to others:

The King Pasenadi asks the Buddha, "To the born, Lord, is there any other than ageing and death?" To this the Buddha replies, "To the born, great king, there is nothing apart from ageing-and-death. Great king, even those who are eminent nobles, prosperous, owning great treasure, great wealth, large hoards of gold and silver, immense means, abundant supplies of goods and corn—to them too, being born, there is nothing apart from ageing-and-death. Great king, even those who are eminent divines,.....Great king, even those who are eminent householders, prosperous, owning great

1. *Theragāthā*, Verse 1022.

2. *Etam amataṃ anupādā cittassa vimokkho*. (*Majjhimanikāya*, Sutta No. 106).

3. In fact in the *Theragāthā*, Verses 606 & 607, the arahat uses the word 'death' in reference to himself (See page 254.)



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treasure, great wealth, large hoards of gold and silver, immense means, abundant supplies of goods and corn—to them too, being born, there is nothing apart from ageing-and-death. Great king, even those who are monks who are arahats, destroyers of the cankers, reached completion, done what was to be done, laid down the burden, achieved his own welfare, utterly destroyed the fetter of 'being', released through comprehending rightly—to them too, it is the nature of this body to break up, to be laid down."<sup>1</sup>

Now, after all subjectivity is extinct, never more to arise again, there yet remains life for a while longer, which is the arahat's life, or the living experience of the arahat. The Buddha describes this as *upādisesa*, which means "stuff remaining" or "residue".<sup>2</sup> This too comes to an end when the arahat's life span is over and the body breaks up. We shall be speaking more about this phase of life later on.

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### 1. Atthi nu kho bhante jātassa aññatra jarāmaranāti?

*Natthi kho mahārāja jātassa aññatra jarāmaranā. Yepi te mahārāja khatti-yamahāsālā addhā mahaddhanā mahābhogā pahūtajātarūparajatā pahūtavittū-pakaranā pahūtadhanadhañña, tesampi jātānaṃ natthi aññatra jarāmaranā. Yepi te mahārāja brāhmanamahāsālā . . . Yepi te mahārāja gahapatimahāsālā addhā mahaddhanā mahābhogā pahūtajātarūparajatā pahūtavittupakaranā pahūtadhanadhañña tesampi jātānaṃ natthi aññatra jarāmaranā. Yepi te mahārāja bhikkhu arahanto khināsavā vusitavanto katakaraniyā ohitabhārā anuppattasadatthā parikkhinabhavasañño janā sammadaññāvimuttā, tesampāyaṃ kāyo bhedanadhammo nikkhepanadhammoti. (Samyuttanikāya I, Kosalasamyutta, Bandhanavagga, Sutta No. 3).*

### 2. See page 292....



## CHAPTER XII

### NESCIENCE (*AVIJJĀ*)

What has gone before would indicate that the *puthujjana* remains a *puthujjana* because he does not understand and see the four noble truths; in other words, because he has **nescience** regarding the four noble truths. In the Suttas this nescience regarding the four noble truths is referred to as *avijjā*. (The word *avijjā* by itself simply means nescience as against science or knowledge.) We can also refer to *avijjā* as non-knowledge (*aññāna*) of the four noble truths.

“But what, friends, is nescience?.....

“That which is non-knowledge of *dukkha*, non-knowledge of the arising of *dukkha*, non-knowledge of the ceasing of *dukkha*, non-knowledge of the path leading to the ceasing of *dukkha*,—this, friends, is called nescience”.<sup>1</sup>

*Avijjā* can of course be defined in many ways. This is so because the nescience regarding any one phenomenon characterizing the *puthujjana*—such as *upādāna*, *tanhā*, *bhava*, and so on— involves the nescience regarding the others. In the Suttas of the *Avijjavagga* of the *Samyuttanikāya III*, *avijjā* is defined as not understanding as it really is (*yathābhūtaṃ, na pajānāti*) the arising and ceasing nature of the five-holding-aggregates, or as not understanding as they really are the satisfaction in, the misery in, and the escape from the five-holding-aggregates.<sup>2</sup> In like manner, in these same Suttas, *vijjā*—i.e. science or know-

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1. *Katamā paṇāvuso avijjā . . . . . Yam kho āvuso dukkhe aññānam, dukkha-samudaye aññānam, dukkhanirodhe aññānam, dukkhanirodhagāminiyā patipadāya aññānam, ayam vuccati āvuso avijjā. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 9)*

2. (Though these Suttas do not qualify the aggregates as holding-aggregates it is quite obvious that it is the latter that are referred so. In fact where holding is right along implied the Suttas often omit the word *upādāna*. But in the Suttas which need make the distinction between the holding-aggregates and the aggregates without holding the distinction is deliberately stressed.)



ledge —is defined as the understanding these things as they really are (*yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti*). It should of course be remembered that in all this, what is referred to by knowledge (*ñāna*), is not a conceptual or ideational knowledge of the four noble truths. But the knowledge that is derived from **understanding** and **seeing** the four noble truths in experience. (In Chapter III we dealt with this question of knowledge). And the nescience or non-knowledge is the **absence** of the knowledge that is derived from this seeing and understanding.

Now in Chapter II we said that *avijjā* is a very stable phenomenon. Let us try and determine how that is so.

Consider a simple example. I do not know as it really is the internal structure of the moon, and **I know that I do not know** about it. Thus there is in me a non-knowledge of a thing and a knowledge of the non-knowledge of that thing. However, I am not distressed by this fact. This knowledge of non-knowledge gives me no unpleasure.

Again, I do not know what will happen to me after death or whether I will be alive in ten years' time or dead in ten years' time, and I know that I do not know about it. So here too there is a non-knowledge of a thing and a knowledge of non-knowledge of that thing. But in this case I am distressed (to some degree or other) by the fact. This knowledge of non-knowledge gives me unpleasure.

Thus, in the one case, knowledge of non-knowledge determines unpleasure, whilst in the other case it does not. What then is the reason for the difference? The reason is simply that the first case does not concern **me** whilst the latter does.

Now, then, let us examine the **corollary** to the case of knowledge of non-knowledge that **is** distressing by reason of its being something that concerns me. This corollary would be: if **no** distress or unpleasure is determined by something that concerns **me**, then it is only because there is in me non-knowledge of the non-knowledge concerning that thing. In other words it is only because **I do not know that I do not know** about, it.



The *puthujjana* is not distressed by his non-knowledge of the four noble truths **even though** the four noble truths are just what tells him what his experience is and what best he should do under the circumstances. Surely there is nothing more important and of more concern for the individual to know than the structure and nature of his experience and what best he should do with his life? But yet he is not distressed or concerned by his non-knowledge regarding it. The reason is that he has **no** knowledge of his non-knowledge. **He does not know that he does not know** that the four noble truths are the things he **should** know and understand for his own welfare. If he thinks (or believes) that the four noble truths do concern him to such an important extent, and further if he knows that he has no knowledge regarding them, he would certainly be distressed. The consequence of this state of affairs is that his non-knowledge of the four noble truths **is sustained or is nourished**, by his non-knowledge-of his non-knowledge of the four noble truths. So that, non-knowledge of non-knowledge of the four noble truths sustains non-knowledge of the four noble truths. In this way *avijjā* is one of the conditions or determinations for *avijjā*. This is in fact directly indicated in the *Sammāditthi Sutta*.<sup>1</sup> In this Sutta it is said:

“With the arising of the cankers, nescience arises; with the ceasing of the cankers, nescience ceases”.<sup>2</sup> And again in the same Sutta it is said: “There are these three cankers,—the canker of sensuality, the canker of ‘being’, and the canker of nescience”.<sup>3</sup> So we have the following situation. *Avijjā* (nescience) is a determined thing dependent upon determinations, viz., upon sensuality, ‘being’ and *avijjā*. But again sensuality depends upon *avijjā*, and so does ‘being’. So that each and every determination upon which *avijjā* depends is itself dependent upon *avijjā*, and in turn, *avijjā* determines these

1. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 9*

2. *Āsavaśamudayā avijjāśamudayo, āsavanirodho avijjānirodho.*

3. *Tayo’me āvuso asavā: kāmāsavo bhavāsavo avijjāsavo.*



same determinations which back again determine *avijjā*. Thus *avijjā* has a hierarchical structure which breeds itself. That is why *avijjā* is so stable inspite of the fact that it is a determined thing, inspite of the fact that it is with sustenance. "Mighty is that element, Kaccāna, that is to say,—the element of nescience."<sup>1</sup> In another Sutta the Buddha says: "An earliest point of nescience monks, is not manifest: 'Before this, nescience was not; then afterwards it came into 'being'. Even if that is said so, monks, nevertheless it is manifest: "With this as conditions, nescience'. I say, monks, that nescience too is with sustenance, not without sustenance".<sup>2</sup> One cannot say that nescience came **after** this simply because it would then mean that **before** that point in time there was **non-nescience** and that nescience arose from non-nescience; and such a situation where nescience arises from non-nescience—that is to say, where non-knowledge of the four noble truths arises from knowledge of the four noble truths—is not possible. But there is another important aspect to this matter. To say that an earliest point of nescience is not manifest is to say that an earliest point of **consciousness** is not manifest, since as we shall see later on, if there is nescience there is consciousness. Sartre says: "actually it seems shocking that consciousness "appears" at a certain moment, that it comes "to inhabit" the embryo, in short that there is a moment when the living being in formation is without consciousness and a moment when a consciousness without a past is suddenly imprisoned in it. But the shock will cease if it appears that there can be no consciousness without a past".<sup>3</sup> This of course takes us to the problem of past and future lives which we would leave for discussion in a

1. *Mahati kho esā Kaccāna dhātu, yadidam avijjādhātu. (Samyuttanikāya II, Dhātusamyutta Sattadhātuvagga, Sutta No. 3)*

2. *Purimā bhikkhave koti na paññāyati avijjāya: I to pubbe avijjg nāhosi, atha pacchā sambhavī ti. Esan ce tam bhikkhave vuccati. Atha capana paññāyati: Idappaccayavāijjā ti. Avijjam p'aham bhikkhave sākāraṃ vadāmi, no anāhāram. (Anguttaranikāya V, Yamakavagga, Sutta No. 1)*

3. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 138.



later chapter. (It may be noted that, inspite of these shocks, Sartre assumes that death is annihilation without even attempting to justify it. Heidegger also makes the same assumption but later on suggests a shift from annihilation by not explicitly assuming annihilation.<sup>1</sup> How far this not explicitly assuming annihilation is an implicit assumption of eternalism is another matter.)

Further, one may ask: if non-knowledge of non-knowledge of the four noble truths is what maintains non-knowledge of the four noble truths, what is it that maintains this non-knowledge of non-knowledge of the four noble truths? The answer is: non-knowledge of non-knowledge of the four noble truths is maintained by non-knowledge of this non-knowledge of non-knowledge of the four noble truths. Now, in theory, there is no reason why one should stop at non-knowledge of non-knowledge of non-knowledge of the four noble truths. One can go on to another layer of non-knowledge as maintaining this non-knowledge of non-knowledge of non-knowledge of the four noble truths. But however one may try, one cannot get past non-knowledge. It is as with *tanhā*, particularly *bhavatanhā*. Not only is there *tanhā*, there is also *tanhā* for *tanhā*; and however one tries one cannot get past it. In reflexion there is *avijjā*, and in the attempt to reflect upon reflexion also there is *avijjā*. Or, in self-observation there is *avijjā*, and in self-observation of self-observation also there is *avijjā*. So that every time there is self-observation there also comes with it a potentially reflexive layer of *avijjā* protecting the earlier layers, thus making it almost impossible to get beyond *avijjā*. It is something like the ship trying to get ahead of its own bow-wave; with every attempt to do so it brings up another bow-wave. The stability of *avijjā* becomes clear. And it is equally clear that once *avijjā* is recognized anywhere in its hierarchical structure to that extent it must disappear everywhere, for the reason that knowledge of the four noble truths involves the knowledge of knowledge of the four noble truths, thus *vijjā*—i.e. science, or knowledge of the four noble truths—replacing *avijjā* (nescience) throughout.

1. *Being and Time*, p. 292.



"What is the one thing, Venerable One, with a monk's elimination of which nescience is eliminated and science arises?"

"Nescience, monk, is the one thing with a monk's elimination of which nescience is eliminated and science arises."<sup>1</sup>

The reason for this is that, unlike other things, nescience is a condition for nescience, or that whatever condition there be upon which nescience depends, that condition involves nescience. So that, whatever else is eliminated, nescience must be eliminated if nescience is to be eliminated. Nescience is the **one** thing that must be eliminated if nescience is to be eliminated.

It is because of *avijjā* that we are unable to recognize *avijjā*; but it is also because of *avijjā* that, with the Buddha's help, we make the attempt to recognize *avijjā*, and if we succeed in doing so, we bring *avijjā* to an end. The same applies to *tanhā*. It is because of *tanhā* (fundamentally *bhavatanhā*) that we are unable to recognize *tanhā*; but it is also because of *tanhā* that, with the Buddha's help, we make the attempt to recognize *tanhā*, and if we succeed in doing so, we bring, *tanhā*, to an end:

"Herein, sister, a monk hears: They say that a monk of such a name by destroying the cankers, himself in this very life, by fully comprehending the cankerless release of the heart and the release through understanding, having attained it abides therein. To him it occurs: Surely I too, by destroying the cankers.....having attained it shall abide therein. Then some time after, though supported by craving, he abandons craving".<sup>2</sup> Since there is *avijjā* in the *puthujjana*'s experience, there is in his experience appropriation (or holding) as well as teleology. But, just as it is in the arahat's case, this functions without any actual self or agent or master to direct it. But, **unlike** in the case of the arahat, it **appears** to be directed

1. *Katamo pana bhante eko dhammo yassa pahānā bhikkhano avijjā pahīyati vijjā uppajjati?*

*Avijjā kho bhikku eko dhammo yassa pahānā bhikkhano avijjā pahīyati vijjā uppajjati.* (Samyattanikāya IV, Satāyatanaṣaṃyutta, Gītanavagga, Sutta No. 6)

2. *Aguttaranikāya II*, p. 145—146.



## NESCIENCE (AVIJJĀ)

by a self for agent or master. *Avijjā* functions automatically i.e. without an agent directing it—but it conceals this fact from itself. *Avijjā* is an automatically functioning blindness (or non-knowledge) to its own automatic functioning.

Removal of the blindness (or non-knowledge) removes the appropriation (or holding) but not the teleology. As we pointed out earlier the arahat's experience is teleological, is purposive, but it is without appropriation, without holding.

All this indicates that it is impossible for the *puthujjana* (except in those extremely rare case of attaining Buddhahood) to see the four noble truths **unless** he places **trust** (*saddhā*) in a Teaching which offers to give him a standpoint from which he can recognize *avijjā* **as** *avijjā*. By his own unaided reflexion the *puthujjana* cannot observe *avijjā* and **recognize** it as *avijjā*, for, as Nānavīra Thera says, "In reflexion *avijjā* is the Judge as well as the Accused" and the verdict is always 'Not Guilty.'<sup>1</sup> To put an end to *avijjā*, one must first recognize *avijjā* as *avijjā*; and for this one must have a standpoint of *avijjā*—i.e. of science or knowledge from which one can see *avijjā*—i.e. nescience or non-knowledge—as *avijjā*, or from which *avijjā* will **in comparison** stand out as *avijjā*. The Buddha's Teaching gives the *puthujjana* that *avijjā*—i.e. that science or knowledge against which *avijjā* will stand out as *avijjā*; and when the *puthujjana* gets this *avijjā*—i.e. this science or knowledge derived from his seeing and understanding the four noble truths—and has thereby ceased to be a *puthujjana*, thereafter this *vijjā* forms for him a perpetually available criterion or norm or background from which he can always recognize *avijjā* as *avijjā*.

The question would of course arise as to how a Buddha recognizes *avijjā* and destroys it without any external aid whatsoever and thereby attain Buddhahood. The Suttas do not tell us how other than narrating the ascetic Gotama's<sup>2</sup> struggle itself prior to the attainment of Buddhahood. But it would

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1. *Notes on Dhamma*.

2. Gotama was the family name of the Buddha of our time.



appear from the Suttas that it is through prodigiously intelligent trial and error over a long period of time. This also indicates that the *puthujjana* can in certain extremely rare cases—precisely as rare as the arising of Buddhas—see the four noble truths and come to the cessation of *dukkha* without external aid.

The *puthujjana*'s helpless and pathetic situation, and the consequent necessity for him to place trust in the Buddha's Teaching, can be laid down by way of *dukkha* too.

Nescience regarding the four noble truths is just nescience regarding *dukkha*, its arising, its ceasing and the path leading to its ceasing. This means that the *puthujjana* does not know that his 'being' is just *dukkha*. And it is precisely because he does not know it that he makes no attempt at bringing it to an end, i.e. at reaching the cessation of 'being'. He perceives his 'being' to be a *sukha* (pleasurableness). Thus *dukkha* is also the experience of the non-knowledge of *dukkha*; for if there is knowledge of *dukkha*, then to that extent *dukkha* would attenuate; and full and thorough knowledge of *dukkha* would be the experience of the utter cessation of *dukkha*, which again is precisely the experience of the arahat.

The point is that the *puthujjana*'s experience of the non-knowledge of *dukkha* is the *dukkha* that he has non-knowledge of.<sup>1</sup> (He has non-knowledge of non-knowledge of *dukkha*.) And this *dukkha* that is at the same time the experience of the non-knowledge of *dukkha* is the *puthujjana*'s (mistaken) acceptance of what **appears** to be a self (or soul or subject or ego) at its face value—i.e. as actually a permanent-pleasurable-self (*nicca-sukha-atta*).<sup>2</sup> Further, since **all** things are taken by him to be 'I', 'mine' and 'self' in one way or another his experience is *dukkha* from top to bottom. But he, the *puthujjana*, perceives all things as **not** being *dukkha*; he perceives them as being *sukha* (pleasurableness). And he sees no non-*dukkha*, or he sees no kind of *sukha*, against which all things which he

1. In one Sutta quoted in Chapter V it is said that neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling, i.e. feeling which by itself is neutral, is pleasurable when known and unpleasurable when not known.

2. The Buddha tells us that neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling—i.e. neutral feeling—is pleasurable when known. On page 77 we explained that what is meant by it is that a neutral feeling is perceived as pleasurable when known to be neutral. It is perceived as pleasurable when known because, when known, it is known as 'for me' or as 'I' or 'self'.



(falsely) takes as non-*dukkha* or as *sukha* will in comparison stand out as *dukkha*. The result is that he has no way of recognizing *dukkha* as *dukkha*; and however much he may 'step back' from himself in a reflexive effort he still cannot but see *dukkha* as non-*dukkha* or as *sukha*. The root-structure of his reflexive experience and his unaided reflexion does not permit him to see things as *dukkha*.<sup>1</sup> It is as with *avijjā*. And so again we come face to face with a similar problem: how then does the *puthujjana* see or know or adjudge that all things are *dukkha* when he perceives no background or criterion or norm of non-*dukkha* against which all things he takes as non-*dukkha* will stand out as *dukkha*? The answer is simple: he does **not** see or know or adjudge that all things are *dukkha*. The *puthujjana* has no criterion or norm for making any such judgement, and so he does not make it. And that is why, as with *avijjā*, he has to take on trust a teaching that offers to give him a criterion or norm for making that judgement. The Buddha's Teaching of *anicca-dukkha-anattā* which flatly contradicts his acceptance of things as being *nicca-sukha-atta* offers to give him **that** non-*dukkha* against which all things **shall** stand out as *dukkha*, and it is **this** norm of non-*dukkha* that, being accepted, becomes the criterion or norm with reference to which he **eventually** comes to **see for himself** that all things are *dukkhā* for the *puthujjana*. And when he sees this, he then has in his experience a 'built in' criterion or norm of non-*dukkha* by which he may further progress towards the cessation of *dukkha*. As a *sekha*—no longer *puthujjana*, but yet not arahat—he has a sort of 'double vision', one part unregenerate, the other regenerate. Except for accelerating his progress the *sekha* who has the three perceptions of *anicca dukkha* and *anattā* has no further need to hear the Teaching. He is—in a sense the Teaching (in part.)

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1. Camus concludes that living is absurd, yet argues that "suicide is not legitimate." Quite clearly the two theses are at variance with each other however much Camus tries to reconcile them. The trouble is that Camus does not see the **reason** for the contradiction. The reason is simply that the involuntary or voluntary perceptions of pleasurable (sukha) and permanence (nicca) which lie at the root-structure of every reflexive experience is far more effective a thing than conceptual thinking or clever arguing. This perception of pleasurable, particularly diverts the sequence of his thinking from arriving at its logical conclusion that suicide is legitimate if living is absurd—that is to say, of course, if one assumes, as Camus does, that death is annihilation.



So that, far from being a self (or immortal soul) that adjudges all things to be *dukkha* with reference to an objective non-*dukkha*, it is only with a seeing the total subsidence of (notions of) subjectivity that there appears a non-*dukkha* with reference to which the judgement that all things are *dukkha* (for the *puthujjana*) becomes possible at all. And this non-*dukkha* with reference to which all things are *dukkha* is not a pleasure (*sukha*) as known by the *puthujjana*, for whatever pleasure (*sukha*) or unpleasure (*dukkha*) the *puthujjana* experiences and knows is that connected with 'being' (*bhava*)....It is the relief from this pleasure and unpleasure, from this pleasure and unpleasure beyond which the *puthujjana* cannot see. This relief, or this non-*dukkha*, which the *sekha* sees but does not experience, is what the *arahat* experiences at all times in his life. In the Suttas the word *sukha* is used to denote this non-*dukkha* too. In fact it is referred to as the **highest** or **ultimate** *sukha*—*paramam sukham*.<sup>1</sup>

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1. *Mahāvagga I, Muca'indakatha*,



## CHAPTER XIII

### NIBBĀNA

We have said that the fundamental reflexive structure of the arahat's experience is characterised by the absence of the tendency to conceivings of subjectivity—i.e. of the *ahankāramamankāramānānusaya*. When this tendency is absent all conceivings of subjectivity, voluntary or involuntary, are also absent. And this is because there is in his reflexive structure not even a trace of *avijjā*. So long as there is *avijjā*, even a trace of it, all things are fundamentally as described in the Sutta on the not-structure; that is to say, they are inherently **in subjection**, they **are** held, or are **to be** held. "If, monks, knowledge is not purified and cleansed for themselves, even that mere fraction of knowledge that these venerable recluses and divines cleanse, even that is called holding in these recluses and divines."<sup>1</sup> He the arahat, knows that this **is** *dukkha*, that *dukkha* **should** be thoroughly understood (*pariññeyya*), that *dukkha* **has been** thoroughly understood; he knows that this **is** the arising of *dukkha*, that the arising of *dukkha* **should** be laid aside (*pahātabba*), that the arising of *dukkha* **has been** laid aside; he knows that this **is** the ceasing of *dukkha*, that the ceasing of *dukkha* **should** be realized (*saccikatabba*), that the ceasing of *dukkha* **has been** realized; he knows that this **is** the path leading to the ceasing of *dukkha*, that the path leading to the ceasing of *dukkha* **should** be (fully) developed (*bhavatabbe*), that the path leading to the ceasing of *dukkha* **has been** (fully) developed. The four noble truths have been seen and known by him in all these twelve ways, for until they are known and seen in all these twelve ways "knowledge-and-seeing is not fully purified (*ñānadassana na suvisuddham*)."<sup>2</sup>

1. *Paccattaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, ñāne asati parisuddhe pariyodāte, yad api te bhonto samanabrāhmaṇa ātattha ñānabhāgamattaṃ eva pariyodapenti, tad api tesam bhavataṃ samanabrāhmaṇānaṃ upādānaṃ akkhāyati.* (*Majjimanikāya, Sutta No. 102*)

2. *Mahāvagga I, Pancavaggiyakathā.*



Consequently, the question may arise: whilst the mental functions of the arahat lasts—i.e.—during his lifetime—does the arahat obtain further knowledge regarding the four noble truths. The answer is: no **necessary** further comprehension **can** take place after one has become arahat. "For the arahat, friend, there is nothing further to be done or to be added to the done."<sup>1</sup> As to whether any additional but unnecessary knowledge arises in the arahat while his mental functions last, the answer could be yes; we cannot for certain say, nor do the Suttas definitely tell us, nor also is it necessary to know.

In the *Mūlapariyāya Sutta* the Buddha tells us that the root-structure of his reflexive experience is the **same** as the arahat's in so far as both are devoid of all conceivings of subjectivity, and differ only in degree of comprehension. That is to say, whilst the arahat has "thoroughly understood" (*pariññātam*), the Buddha has "thoroughly understood to the end" (*pariññātantam*). The arahat's thorough understanding is that **necessary to the extent of destroying dukkha**. It is **only, to this extent**, which is of a purely **practical** significance, that the arahat's understanding is said to be thorough, or complete or fully purified. But the understanding of the Buddha exceeds that limit. This situation would perhaps allow for the arahat to obtain further knowledge or understanding concerning *dukkha* as time goes on, though not to the extent of a Buddha, and perhaps also allow for certain arahats having a higher degree of understanding than others though the minimum understanding necessary for the destruction of *dukkha* is there common to all of them as an absolute **must**. A further question can consequently arise: how does the Buddha know that **he** has gone to the very end of knowledge? Who can answer this question except another Buddha? And the answer could merely be: The Buddha **knows**. So again we come back to the same question: how? This means that we will be going round and round in circles. And this is perhaps one of the reasons why

1. *Natthi kho āvuso arahato uttarakaraṇīyaṃ katassa vā paticcayo. (Samyuttanikāya III, Khandhasamyutta, Dhammakathikavagga, Sutta No. 10).*



the Buddha said that of the four unthinkables (*acinteyya*),<sup>1</sup> which if thought of and pondered on with a view to arriving at a complete and final conclusion will only lead to madness and distraction, a Buddha ('the Buddha-range of Buddha's *Bujohanam Buddhavisayo*) is one.

The whole point is that any further knowledge that **might** come to the arahat is of absolutely **no** value or meaning to him, is of no significance at all to him, because "he has done what was to be done"—*kataṃ karanīyam*. One description the Buddha gives to the arahat's life is "stuff remaining"—*upādisesa*. The utter coldness and completely impersonal nature of the arahat's life is indicated in this description. It matters not whether, once arahatness has been reached, the arahat lives for a few seconds or a few years. But more of this as we go on.

Now when all conceivings of subjectivity have ceased, then all those things that depend upon these conceivings have also necessarily ceased. What are those things? They are those things called holding (*upādāna*), craving (*tanhā*), 'being' (*bhava*), birth (*jāti*), ageing-and-death (*jarāmaranā*), etc. In short, the determinations that determine *dukkha* have ceased, and therefore *dukkha* also has ceased.

Now, cessation of something simply means the ceasing of that thing. A thing arises (*samudaya*), it persists (*thiti*), and then it ceases (*nirodha*). In the case of the arahat the cessation is a cessation **once and for all**. That is to say, the phenomena concerned—which would be the determinations that determine *dukkha*—having ceased, **no more arise**. It is a "ceasing without remainder"—*asesanirodha*.

For this reason, this cessation is also described as **extinction**. And this leads us to the meaning of the Pali word *nibbāna*, a word which simply means **extinction**. So the Buddha teaches

1. *Anguttaranikāya II, Catukkanipāta, Apannakavagga, Sutta No. 7.*

\*. The other three unthinkables mentioned in this Sutta are (1) the range of a meditator (*jhāyissa jhānavisayo*), (2) the ripening action (*kammapāka*) and (3) world-speculation (*lokacinta*).



that the arahat's experience, or arahatness (*arahatta*), is the **experience of extinction**, or in other words, the **experience of *nibbāna***. The arahat is describable as "one attained to extinction here itself" (*ditthadhammanibbānappatto*).<sup>1</sup>

As we just said, when *avijjā* is extinct, all conceivings of subjectivity are extinct, all holding is extinct, and likewise all those things dependent upon these things are also extinct. **The extinction of any one of these things involves the extinction of the rest.** This situation therefore permits us to define *nibbāna* in one of many ways; and it is usual to describe *nibbāna* in terms of that which is under discussion. If 'being' is being discussed, then it would be appropriate to describe *nibbāna* as the extinction or cessation of 'being': "The cessation of 'being' is *nibbāna*"—*Bhavanirodho nibbānam*.<sup>2</sup> If the 'person' is being discussed then it would be appropriate to say that *nibbāna* is the extinction or cessation of the 'person'—*sakkāyanirodho*.<sup>3</sup> If we reckon the purpose of the Buddha's Teaching (which should at no time be lost sight of) then we would describe *nibbāna* as the extinction of *dukkha*, or as the cessation of *dukkha* (*dukkhanirodho*), or as the destruction of *dukkha* (*dukkhakkhayam*). However, in the Suttas the commonest description of *nibbāna* is that it is "the destruction of lust, the destruction of hate, the destruction of delusion."—*rāgakkhayo dosakkhayo mohakkhayo*.<sup>4</sup>

In the *Samyuttanikāya IV, Asankhatasamyutta*, there are thirty-three descriptive words given for the destruction of lust, hate and delusion. As terms for the destruction of lust, hate and delusion they also become terms for arahatness and so for *nibbāna* as well. In fact one term is *nibbāna* itself. It is well worth rapidly going through these terms dwelling at some length on the more important ones.

1. *Samyuttanikāya II, Abhisamayāsamyutta, Mahāvagga, Sutta No. 7.*

2. *Anguttaranikāya V, Dasakanipāta, Anisamasvagga, Sutta No. 7.*

3. *Samyuttanikāya III, Khandhasamyutta, Antavagga, Sutta No. 3.*

4. *Samyuttanikāya IV, Jambukhadakasamyutta, Sutta No. 1.*



(1) *Asankhata*—The Not-Determined.

We have seen its meaning earlier. The word *asankhata* means “not-determined”; and it implies that no ‘person’ or subject (‘I’) is determined. And since it is only with the arahat that there is no ‘person’ determined, the word ‘impersonal’ can be applied in its **fullest** meaning only to the arahat.

(2) *Antam*—The End.

Arahatness is the *summum bonum* of all life’s endeavour. It is the end. All that had to be done has been done (*katam karanīyam*). There is no more in here-ness (*naparam itthattaya*).

(3) *Anasavaṃ*—The Without Cankers

All the cankers, which can be categorized under the three broad headings of *kāmāsava* (canker of sensuality), *bhavāsava* (canker of ‘being’) and *avijjāsava* (canker of nescience) are utterly extinct. Arahatness is free of the cankers.

(4) *Saccam*—The Truth

The experience of arahatness is the experience of the highest truth, which means it is the experience of the highest actuality, of the highest reality. “For this, monk, is the ultimate noble understanding, that is to say—the knowledge of the destruction of all *dukkha*. That release of his is founded on truth, and is unshakeable . . . . For this, monk, is the ultimate noble truth, that is to say—*nibbāna* (extinction), the nature of which is without falsity.”<sup>1</sup>

(5) *Param*—The Beyond

The arahat has “gone beyond” (*paramgata*). And what has he gone beyond? He has gone beyond ‘(my) self’ and its inseparable correlative ‘a world that concerns (my) self’. Thus he is also gone beyond the range of all existential thinking. The consequence of this situation is of course that he is gone beyond all *dukkha*.

1. *Esā hi bhikkhu, paramā āriya paññā yadidaṃ sabbadukkhakkaye ñanam. Tass sā vimutti saṃve thitā akuppā hoti . . . . Etaṃ hi, bhikkhu, paramaṃ ariyasaccam, a yadidaṃ amo, adhammaṃ nibbānaṃ* (*Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 140*).



(6) *Nipunaṃ*—The Subtle

The experience of the arahat is not plain to common understanding. It is deep, and cannot be comprehended through a process of mere conceptual thinking. It is comprehensible only to the intelligent and wise man, and that too if he develops right view (*sammāditthi*). *Nipunaṃ* can also be taken to mean "accomplished" or "skilled".

(7) *Suddhasaṃ*—The Very Hard to See

What is so very hard to see is that the arahat has intention (or intended intention, or again that he has preference, choice,) but no thoughts of subjectivity, that he has intention but no *tanhā*. Equally hard is it to see that the arahat is an individual but not a 'person', not a 'somebody', not a subject ('I').

(8) *Ajaraṃ*—The Not-decaying.

In Chapter XII we saw the meaning of the arahat not decaying. The changes that occur to his faculties, eye, ear, nose, tongue and body are not decay to him.

(9) *Dhūvaṃ*—The Stable

Arahatness is **the** stable because it is the **only** state of life that **does not** and **cannot** change its reflexive character or nature. For instance, the arahat can never go back to being a *puthujjana*. Arahatness is irreversible. (It will be noted that the Buddha's Teaching is aimed at **altering** one's thinking and altering it to the point whence it can **never more** be altered.)

(10) *Apalokitaṃ*—The Taken Leave of

The arahat has "taken leave of" the world. For him there is no longer a "world for me". So long as he lives he experiences, feelings, perceptions, etc., but they have no existential significance.

(11) *Anidassanaṃ*—The Non-Indicative

This is one of the most important descriptions of the arahat's experience, yet one which is often misunderstood. *Anidassana* is usually seen explained as "invisible" or "cannot" be seen with the eyes". Far from such, *anidassana* refers to something very important and equally difficult to see. (In the Suttas the



## THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING AND THE AMBIGUITY OF EXISTENCE

So long as there are notions of subjectivity there are unpleasurable things like anxiety. **Complete** or **utter** peace is possible only when there is no subjectivity whatsoever. A peace that is higher than such a peace is not possible. Thus the arahat experiences the highest peace.

### (14) *Amatam*—The Deathless

In Chapter XII we saw what is meant by the arahat being deathless.

### (15) *Panitam*—The Excellent

Arahatness is the most excellent experience possible.

### (16) *Sivam*—The Fortune

Arahatness is the most fortunate experience simply because there is no *dukkha* whatsoever.

### (17) *Khemam*—The Security

There being no 'I' or 'self' to feel insecure to any degree whatsoever, the experience of the arahat is the experience of utter security. No misfortune whatsoever—i.e. anxiety, worry, fear, etc.—can ever befall him.

*Khema* can also be taken to mean quietness or peace.

### (18) *Tanhakkhaya*—The Destruction of *tanhā*

The arahat is free from all *tanhā*, of whatever kind it be.

### (19) *Acchariyam*—The Wonderful

Arahatness is the truly wonderful experience.

### (20) *Abbhūtam*—The Astonishing

Arahatness is the truly astonishing experience.

### (21) *Anītikam*—The Freedom from Harm

In the arahat's experience there is no 'I' or self to be harmed. An unpleasant bodily feeling is experienced in just the same unattached or unaffected manner as a pleasant bodily feeling would be.

### (22) *Anītikadhammam*—The State of Freedom from Harm

Arahatness is a state of freedom from harm.



(23) *Nibbānaṃ*—Extinction

This is a word with a very broad meaning, and in its meaning it includes the extinction of **all** those things that determine *dukkha*. As we shall presently see the word is extended to cover the extinction of the residual five aggregates which occurs when the life of the arahat comes to an end.

(24) *Avyāpajjho*—The Harmless

The Arahāt having no ill-will (*avyāpāda*) whatsoever, he cannot be of any harm whatsoever.

(25) *Virāgo*—Non-Attachment

Arahatness is described as non-attachment simply because there is no attachment of any kind whatever to things. With non-attachment there also comes the corresponding characteristic of non-resistance or non-repulsion. The arahāt is neither attracted by things nor repelled by them.

(26) *Suddhi*—The Purity

Arahatness is purity in that it is free of all defilements (*kilesa*). It is only arahatness that, in the true and worthy sense of the word, can be called pure.

(27) *Mutti*—Release

Arahatness is the release from all *dukkha*.

(28) *Anālayo*—The Done Away With

Usually in the context of done away with *tanhā*. The arahāt has completely done away with *tanhā* or any other things that determine *dukkha*.

(29) *Dīpaṃ*—The Island

Used in a metaphorical sense for safety, i.e. safety from all dangers or miseries, from all *dukkha*. Arahatness is the island of safety.

(30) *Lena*—The Cave

Again used in a metaphorical sense. Arahatness is compared to a cave which one enters in order to be safe from all harm, etc.



(31) *Tanam*—The Shelter

Once again used in a metaphorical sense. Arahantness is the shelter from all harm etc.

(32) *Saranam*—The Refuge

Arahantness is the only refuge from *dukkha*.

(33) *Parayānam*—The Ultimate Goal

A goal beyond arahantness there is not. All other goals are nothing but instances of *dukkha*. Arahantness being wholly and entirely free from *dukkha*, it is also the ultimate goal.

Another common description of arahantness—which we have already mentioned on page 274 is “ultimate ease”—*paramam sukham*. Of this ultimate ease the Buddha says:

“Happy is detachment in the world—the going beyond sensuality. The dispelling of the conceit ‘(I) am’—that is the ultimate ease.”<sup>1</sup>

The word *sukham* when used in this context is often seen rendered as “happiness”, and consequently arahantness is described as “the ultimate happiness”. But the word happiness is invariably understood to mean a kind of refined pleasure; and therein lies the danger in using the word happiness. If by “ultimate happiness” is meant that pleasantness which is born of the utter relief from the pleasure and unpleasure that is tied to ‘being’, then indeed arahantness can be described as “the ultimate happiness”.

A very important description of arahantness is that it is the experience of “the burden laid down” (*ohitabhāra*). The Buddha says:

“I will preach to you, monks, the burden, the carrying the burden, the taking of the burden, and the putting down the burden. Do you listen.

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1. *Sukha virāgata loke kāmānaṃ samatikkamo*  
*Asmimānassa yo vinayo etaṃ ve paramaṃ sukhaṃ*  
(*Mahāvagga I, Mucalindakathā*)



"What, monks, is the burden?

"The five-holding-aggregates should be the reply. What five? They are the holding-aggregate of matter, the holding-aggregate of feeling, the holding-aggregate of perception, the holding-aggregate of determinations and the holding-aggregate of consciousness. This, monks, is called the burden.

"And, what, monks, is the carrying of the burden? It is the individual (thus) should be the reply: that venerable one of such and such a name and of such and such a family. This, monks, is called the carrying of the burden.

"And what, monks, is the taking of the burden? That craving, leading to more 'being', conjoined with desire and lust, delighting in this and that,—that to say: craving-for-sensuality, craving-for-'being', craving-for-'unbeing'. This, monks, is called taking of the burden.

"And what, monks, is the putting down the burden? The entire fading out and cessation, the giving up, the relinquishment, of that same craving, the release from it, its abandonment, this, monks, is called putting down the burden."<sup>1</sup>

Briefly then, the burden is the five-holding-aggregates; the carrying the burden is the continuous being as a self, or as this permanent-pleasurable-I of such and such a name and of such

1. *Bhāraṃ ca vo bhikkhave desissāmi bhāraharaṃ ca bhāradānaṃ ca bhāranikkhepanaṃ. Taṃ sunatha.*

*Katamo bhikkhave bhāro? Pancupādānakkhandhā tissa vacanīyam. Katam paṇca? Seyyathīdam: rūpupādānakkhandho vedanupādānakkhandho sannupādānakkhandho sankhārupādānakkhandho viññānupādānakkhandho. Ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave bhāro.*

*Katamo ca bhikkhave bhārahāro? Puggalo tissa vacanīyam: yoyam āyasmā evamnāmo evamgotto. Ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave bhārahāro.*

*Katamanca bhikkhave bhāradānaṃ. Tāyaṃ tanhā ponobhavikā nandirāga sahaḡatā tatra tatrabbhinandanā: Seyyathīdam: kāmataṇhā bhavataṇhā vibhava-  
tanhā. Idaṃ vuccati bhikkhave bhāradānaṃ.*

*Katamanca bhikkhave bhāranikkhepanaṃ? Yo tassayeva tanhāya asesavirāga-  
nirodho cāgo patinissaggo mutti anālayo. Idaṃ vuccati bhikkhave bhāranik-  
khepanaṃ ti.*

(*Samyuttanikāya III, Khandhasaṃyutta, Bhāravagga, Sutta No. 1*)



and such a family; the taking of the burden is fundamentally the craving to be that self; and the putting down the burden is the abandoning that craving; and when that is accomplished the holding is also abandoned and only the five-aggregates remain. Note that carrying the burden is not being just an individual, but being an individual regarded as a self, and this regarding as a self is done only because the individual concerned is one in whose root-structural reflexive experience there is that fundamental holding, which holding is what in the Sutta is called the burden. The individual **without** this burden is the arahat. This Sutta also tells us that the word *puggala* which means individual is a word that is broader in meaning than the word *sakkāya* which means 'person'. Every 'person' is an individual, but every individual is not a 'person'; and it is **only** the arahat that is an individual but **not** a 'person'.

A description of arahatness that makes all ethics, psychology, psychiatry, etc., a mere playing game is that given in the *Dīghanikāya*, Sutta No. 29, where the Buddha describing the arahat says:

"Friend, the monk in whom the cankers are destroyed is incapable of deliberately depriving a living being of life. The monk in whom the cankers are destroyed is incapable of taking what is not given so that it constitutes theft. The monk in whom the cankers are destroyed is incapable of pursuing sex. The monk in whom the cankers are destroyed is incapable of knowingly uttering falsehood. The monk in whom the cankers are destroyed is incapable of laying up treasure for indulging in pleasures as he did when being a householder. The monk in whom the cankers are destroyed is incapable of taking a course of action through desire. The monk in whom the cankers are destroyed is incapable of taking a course of action through hate. The monk in whom the cankers are destroyed is incapable of taking a course of action through delusion. The monk in whom the cankers are destroyed is incapable of taking a course of action through fear. Friend, the monk who is arahat, in whom the fetters are destroyed, has done what had to be done, has laid down the burden, attained the highest, completely



destroyed the fetter of 'being', released through right knowledge, is incapable of these nine behaviours."<sup>1</sup>

The arahat is **incapable** (*abhabbo*) of doing these nine things. The nature of arahatness is such that it is **impossible** for these things to be done. For these things to be done notions of 'I', 'mine' and 'self' must be present, and these notions are absent in the arahat, nor can they ever arise in him again.

But with all this, the idea of *nibbāna* or extinction as being the *summum bonum* or ultimate goal of human endeavour will doubtlessly strike the *puthujjana*, quite innocently enjoying the pleasures of his senses, as a singularly discouraging notion if he is told that it is no more than the cessation of 'being'.

He may not go so far as to hope for an Absolute described by Bradley in the following words: 'It would be experience entire, containing all elements in harmony....Thought would be present as a higher intuition; will would be there where the Ideal has become reality; and beauty and pleasure and feeling would live on in this total fulfilment. Every flame of passion, chaste and carnal, would still burn in the Absolute unquenched and unabridged, a note absorbed in the harmony of its highest bliss.'<sup>2</sup> ("Hurrah!" exclaimed Ñānavīra Thera as he read this description. We on our part add: "Three cheers!") Yes indeed, overtly at least, he may not go so far as to hope for such a thing. But even the thoughtful *puthujjana* would like to expect something more positive than the extinction of 'being' as the *summum bonum*. He shrinks before the idea that his 'being'—with its anguishes and its ecstasies, its successes and its failures, its hopes and its fulfilments—is wholly

1. *Abhabbo āvuso khīnāsavo bhikkhu sancicca pānaṃ jīvitaṃ voropetum. Abhabbo khīnāsavo bhikkhu adinnaṃ theyyasamkhātā ādātum. Abhabbo khīnāsavo bhikkhu methunaṃ dhammaṃ patisevitum. Abhabbo khīnāsavo bhikkhu saṃpājāna musā bhāsītum. Abhabbo khīnāsavo bhikkhu sannidhi kārakaṃ kāme paribhujitum seyyathāpi pubbe agāriyabhūto. Abhabbo khīnāsavo bhikkhu chandāgatim gantum. Abhabbo khīnāsavo bhikkhu dosāgatim gantum. Abhabbo khīnāsavo bhikkhu mohāgatim gantum. Abhabbo khīnāsavo bhikkhu bhayāgatim gantum. To so āvuso bhikkhu arahāṃ khīnāsavo vusitavā katakaraṇīyo ohitabhāo anuppatṭa sadattha parikkhīnabhavasamyojano sammadaññā vimut to abhabbo so imāni nava thānāni ajjhācaritum ti.*

2. Appearance and Reality, Chapter XV, p. 152.



gratuitous; and he is repelled by the idea that he would be better off without it. It is only natural therefore, that he, not seeing *dukkha*, should look for a formula so as to save something from what he imagines to be shipwreck. Even in the final and inevitable ruin of all his hopes, he could, like a Jaspers, despairingly continue to cling by imagining that it is possible 'in shipwreck to experience Being'. And so when, as in the following passages in the *Udāna*, the Buddha describes *nibbāna* in positive terms as against the usual negative, he concludes that the Buddha is hinting at some sort of eternal metaphysical existence, or at some living 'Reality' behind Appearances—an Absolute, an Unconditioned, or what have you—into which the arahat passes after his life here is over:

"There is, monks, that base wherein is neither earth nor water nor fire nor air, nor the base of endless space nor the base of endless consciousness, nor the base of nothingness, nor this world, nor a world beyond, nor both sun and moon. There, monks, I say there is neither coming, nor going, nor standing, nor passing away, nor arising. Without support, without proceeding, without anything as object it is. This, indeed, is the end of *dukkha*.<sup>1</sup>

And:

"There is, monks, the not-born, the not-being, the not-made, the not-determined. If, monks, there were not that not-born, not-being, not-made, not-determined, there would be manifest no escape here from the born, the being, the made, the determined. But, monks, since there is the not-born, the not-being, the not-made, the not-determined, therefore an escape from the born, the being, the made, the determined is manifest."<sup>2</sup>

1. *Atthi bhikkhave tadāyatanam yattha neva pathavī na āpo na tejo na vāyo naākāśāna-ncāyatanam na viññānancāyatanam na ākiñcaññāyatanam na nevasaññānāsaññāyatanam nāyam loka na paraloka na ubho candimasuriya. Tatrāham bhikkhave neva āgatiṃ vadāmi, na gatiṃ na thitiṃ na cutiṃ na upapattiṃ. Appatittham appavattam anārammanamevetam. Esevanto dukkhassāti. (Udāna, Pataligamiyavagga, Sutta No. 1).*

2. *Atthi bhikkhave ajātaṃ, abhūtaṃ akataṃ asankhataṃ. No ve tam bhikkhave abhavissa ajataṃ abhūtaṃ akataṃ asankhataṃ nayidha jātassa bhūtassa katassa sankha tassa nissaranam paññāyetha. Tasmā ca kho bhikkhave atthi ajātaṃ abhutamakataṃ asankhataṃ tasmā jātassa bhūtassa katassa sankhatassa nissaranam paññāyati. (Udāna, Pataligamiyavagga, Sutta No. 3).*



These are descriptions of the arahat's experience. In the arahat's experience consciousness is "not devoted" (*ananuruddha*)<sup>1</sup> to anything, as for example the *puthujjana*'s is when he experiences a pleasant feeling. On the other hand it is "not in opposition" (*appativiruddha*)<sup>2</sup> to anything either, as for example the *puthujjana*'s is when he experiences an unpleasant feeling. The arahat makes preference—that is to say, of the intentions present he intends this intention and not the others—, but it is neither a devotion associated with pleasure nor an opposition associated with unpleasure. Devotion and opposition are determined only when consciousness is indicative of a subject ('I'), when there is holding. The arahat's experience is **devoid** of anything forming an object for holding—*anarammanamevetam*. The holding being over, no subject ('I') stands. A subject ('I') being over, a world (*loko*) for a subject ('I') is over, whether that be a world here or a world beyond. No mental absorptions (*jhāna*) of infinite space, infinite consciousness, etc. are there for a subject ('I'). No subject ('I') being there to come or to go, coming and going are over. No sun, no moon remains for a subject ('I'). These things have all lost **existential significance**. They are without **existential base** or **support**; that is to say, they have no base 'for me'. And the experience of earth, water, fire, etc. that is **without** a 'for me' is **that base** (*tadayatana*) that is referred to in the statement, "There is, monks, that base wherein is neither earth nor water nor fire . . . . This, indeed, is the end of *dukkha*.' In other words, there is a six pairs of bases (i.e. the six sense organs and the six sense objects) without a 'for me', which precisely, is the end of *dukkha*. Briefly then, arahatness is referred to as the not-born, the not-being, the not-made, the not-determined, because with regard to the arahat there is no longer an 'I' or 'self' that is born or being or made or determined; hence also no longer a world that is born or being or made or determined as a correlative of an 'I' or 'self'.

1. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 11.*

2. *Ibid.*



But yet if in his stewing mind the *puthujjana* cannot help feeling that these passages refer to the aftermath of the arahat's life which he thinks ought to, somehow, be an eternity of positive bliss or at least of some form of experience, he may ponder over the following Sutta passage which follows our two earlier passages in the same Chapter of the *Udāna*: "For him who clings there is agitation. For him who clings not there is no agitation. Agitation not being, there is allaying. Allaying being, there is no inclination. Inclination not being, there is no coming, no going. Coming and going not being, there is no appearance-disappearance. Appearance-disappearance not being, there is no here nor yonder nor between the two. This, indeed, is the end of *dukkha*."<sup>1</sup> Clearly this refers to the experience of the arahat, "For him who clings not" (*anissitassa*) means "for the living arahat"; and it is "for him who clings not" that there is no coming and no going (*agati gati na hoti*). And further, as was pointed out to Bāhiya Dāruciriya, the 'here' and the 'yonder' and the 'between the two' not being there for an 'I' or 'self' is just the experience of the end of *dukkha*.

It needs hardly be said that the speculations wherein these *Udāna* passages are reckoned as pointing to some form of eternal existence of the arahat after his life is over are born of holding to belief in self (*attavādupādāna*). The *puthujjana* cannot think of the arahat either other than in terms of a self, and a self is necessarily eternal. In fact the *Mūlapariyāya Sutta* goes on to state that the idea of *nibbāna* can be conceived by the uninstructed *puthujjana* in the fashion "*Nibbāna* is for me"—*Nibbānam meti maññati*. And whether the *puthujjana* is not instructed at all or is instructed wrongly with "dark teachings" (*kanhā dhamma*), he still remains an **uninstructed** *puthujjana*. To the uninstructed *puthujjana*, *nibbāna* is the annihilation of a self or soul; and so he argues that these passages 'must surely imply that *nibbāna* is not simply annihilation.' *Nibbāna*, certainly is not

1. *Nissitassa ca calitaṃ anissitassa calitaṃ natthi. calite āsati passaddhi. Passad-dhiyā sati rati na hoti. Ratiyā asati āgati gati na hoti. Agati gatiyā asati cutūpapāto na hoti, cutūpapāte asati neviḍha na huraṃ na ubhayamantare Esevanto dukkhassati. (Udāna, Pataligamīya vagga, Sutta No. 4)*



'simply annihilation'. It is not annihilation at all for that matter. *Nibbāna*, or extinction, or cessation of 'being', is by no means the same thing as the annihilation of a supposed self or soul. In the *Majjhimanikāya*, *Sutta No. 22*. we have a monk asking the Buddha whether there can be anxiety about subjective absence (*ajjhataṃ asati paritassanā*), to which the Buddha's reply is given in the *Sutta* as follows: "There might be, monk," the Auspicious One said. "here, monk, someone holds the view: 'The world is self; and when I have departed I shall be permanent, enduring, eternal, not having the nature of change; and like this I shall remain for ever and ever.' He listens to the Tathāgata or his disciple setting forth the Teaching for the destroying of all tendencies to (wrong) views, assertions, obsessions, and insistentcies, for the calming of all determinations, for the relinquishing of all foundations, for the destroying of all craving, for the fading out, for cessation, for extinction. It occurs to him thus: 'I shall surely be annihilated! I shall surely perish! I shall surely be no more!' He sorrows, is distressed, and laments, and beating his breast and bewailing, he falls into confusion. Thus indeed, monk, there is anxiety about subjective absence."<sup>1</sup> So there it is. But not so with the *sekha*. The *sekha* sees that **it is only the nescient and the confused that can think there is a way out other than extinction**. He sees, whilst the *puthujjana* does not, that 'being' or 'self'-existence is just *dukkha*, and that the cessation of *dukkha* can **only** be the cessation or extinction of 'being' or 'self'-extinction.

1. *Siyā bhikkhuti Bhagavā avoca. Idha bhikkhu ekaccassa evaṃ ditthi hoti: so loko so attā so pecca bhavissāmi nicco dhuvo sassato aviparināma dhammo; sassatisaṃ tatheva thassāmi ti. So sunāti Tathāgatassa vā Tathāgatasāvakassa vā sabbesaṃ ditthitthānādhitthānapariyutthānābhinivesānusayānaṃ samugghātāya sabbasaṃkhārasamathāya sabhupadhipatinissaggāya tanhakkhayāya virōgāya nirodhāya nibbānāya dhammaṃ desentassa. Tassa evaṃ hoti: ucchijjissāmi nāma su, vinassissāmi nāma su, na su nāma bhavissāmi ti. So socati kilamati paridevati urattālim kandati sammohaṃ āpajjati. Evaṃ kho bhikkhu ajjhataṃ asati paritassanā hoti ti.*



Now, arahatness we saw, is the experience of the extinction of holding. The holding being extinct, arahatness is just the five-aggregates. These five-aggregates form the "residue" or the "stuff remaining". It is referred to as the "extinction element with residue"—*saupādisesa nibbānadhātu*.<sup>1</sup> In the *Majjhimanikāya*, Sutta No. 121, this residue is described as follows: "He understands: this perceiving is empty of the canker of sensuality. He understands: this perceiving is empty of the canker of 'being'. He understands: this perceiving is empty of the canker of nescience. But there is just this that is not-emptiness, that is to say, what is dependent upon this six-sense based body and conditioned by life. What indeed is not there, that he regards as that of which it is empty. But of what is remaining there, that being, he understands: this is."<sup>2</sup> And of that which remains "**bodily** unpleasant feeling" (*sarīrikanam vedanānam dukkham*)<sup>3</sup> could well be a part.

Further, for the arahat, *kamma* or ethically significant action—that is, action concerning an 'I' or 'self'—has ceased. Unskillful *kamma*—i.e. ethical action rooted in lust, hate and delusion leads to further *kamma*, to the arising of *kamma*; whilst skillful *kamma*—i.e. ethical action rooted in non-lust, non-hate and non-delusion, leads to the ceasing of *kamma*. Of unskillful *kamma* it is said "That *kamma* leads to the arising of *kamma*, that *kamma* does not lead to the ceasing of *kamma*,"<sup>4</sup> And of skillful *kamma* it is said. "That *kamma* leads to the ceasing of *kamma*, that *kamma* does not lead to the arising of *kamma*."<sup>5</sup> The arahat not only fully understands all this but has also reached the cessation of

1. *Itivuttaka*, *Dukanipāta*, *Dutiyavagga*, Sutta No. 7.

2. So: uññam idam saññāgataṃ kāmāsavenāti pajjānāti; suññam idam saññāgataṃ bhāvasavenāti pajjānāti suññam idam saññāgataṃ avijjāsavenāti pajjānāti. Atthi c'ev' idam asuññāta, yadidaṃ imaṃ eva kāyaṃ paticca salāyatānikam jīvitapaccayā ti. Iti yaṃ hi kho tattha na hoti, tena taṃ suññam samanupassati yaṃ pana tattha avasittham hoti, taṃ santam idam atthēti pajjānāti.

3. *Majjhimanikāya*, Sutta No. 125.

4. Taṃ kammaṃ kam nasamudayāya sanvattati, na taṃ kammaṃ kammanirodhāya sanvattati. (*Anguttaranikāya* I, *Tikanipāta*, *Sambodhivagga*, Sutta No. 9)

5. Taṃ kammaṃ kammanirodhāya sanvattati, na taṃ kammaṃ kammamudayāya sanvattati. (*Ibid*)



*kamma*. The arahat is one who "has come to the destruction of all *kamma*"—*sabbakammakkhayappatto*.<sup>1</sup> The arahat, no doubt, intentionally acts, but because this action no longer concerns an 'I' or 'self' it is no longer *kamma*, whether skilful (*kusala*) or unskilful (*akusala*), and hence also no longer ethical. *Nibbāna*, or arahatness, is thus the extinction of ethics as well. "Comprehending the parable of the raft, monks, you have to eliminate ethical things too, let alone unethical things."<sup>2</sup> The good or moral behaviour recognized by ethics is no doubt fulfilled in the arahat's pattern of behaviour. In fact, as the *Dīghanikāya, Sutta No. 29* says, it fulfils very much more. But the **intentions** behind the behaviour are quite different in the arahat's case. Ethics, with which the *puthujjana* is concerned, is fundamentally a question 'What should I do?' for the simple reason that the ubiquitous intention of the *puthujjana* is the intention 'for me'. Whatever be the school of ethics, they are—one and all—looking for an answer to the question 'What should I do?' The tendency to the conceit '(I) am' being absent in the arahat there is for him no question 'What should I do?' Hence no ethics, no ethical action. That *nibbāna* is the extinction of ethics is to be understood in just this manner. The arahat's pattern of behaviour is the **consequence** of the destruction of *avijjā* (nescience) and of all those things that depend upon *avijjā*. Even when the arahat makes an endeavour to enlighten a non-arahat, that serves no ethical requirement. The endeavour is purely out of **compassion** (*anukampā*). This compassion should not, however be identified as the compassion exhibited by the *puthujjana*. The *puthujjana*'s compassion is also something ethical; it is conjoined with subjectivity; it is with binding (*sanyutto*); it is with nescience (*avijjā*). The arahat's compassion is no ethical action; it is not conjoined with subjectivity; it is without binding; it is a phenomenon born of science (*viññā*) or knowledge (*ñāna*).

1. *Samyuttanikāya I, Bhikkhunisaṃyutta, Bhikkhunivagga, Sutta No. 8.*

2. *Kūllūpamaṃ vo bhikkhave dhammaṃ desitaṃ jānantehi dhammā pi vo pahāta bbā pageva adhammā. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta, No. 22)*



“Sakka, by whatever reason association is born,  
The one who understands should not be with mind moved  
to compassion by that,  
But since with mind clarified he admonishes another,  
He is not fettered by that. That is (his) compassion and  
sympathy.”<sup>1</sup>

But the arahat as an individual can experience, in terms of bodily comfort and discomfort, what result is left to be experienced due to **earlier** *kamma* done before attainment of arahatness. The *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 86* says that the arahat is “contacted by the result of (earlier) *kamma*”—*puttho kammavipākena*. This Sutta, incidentally, provides us with an example of how an individual—a murderer by name Angulimāla—through pursuance of the Teaching and attaining arahatness reduced to insignificance the grave and serious resultant effects of the unskilled *kamma* earlier done. Experiencing the residual result of earlier *kamma* is a part of the extinction element with residue, i.e. of arahatness.

The arahat says of himself:

“I delight not in death, I delight not in life,  
I await my time composed and aware.”<sup>2</sup>

(Note that just as much as the word ‘I’ is used for convenience in expression, the word ‘death’ is also sometimes used to refer to the laying down of the arahat’s life.)

When arahatness is over, i.e. when the arahat’s life comes to an end, this residue is also over. This latter phase is therefore called the “extinction element without residue” — *anupādisesa*

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1. *Yena kenaci vannena sanvāso sakka jāyati*  
*Nataṃ arahati sappañño manasā anukampitum.*  
*Manasā ce pasannena yadaññāmanusāsati*  
*Na tena hoti sanyutto sānukampā anuddayāti.*  
(*Samyuttanikāya I, Yakkasaṃyutta, Indakavagga, Sutta No. 2*)
  2. *Nābhinandāmi maranaṃ nābhinandāmi jīvitaṃ*  
*Kālaṃ ca patikkhāmi sampajāno patissatoti.*  
(*Theragāta, Verse 607*)



*nibbānadhātu*.<sup>1</sup> And, as we pointed out earlier, it is this extinction element without residue (which again is often identified with the extinction element with residue) that the *puthujjana*, unable to give up holding to belief in self, is so inclined to endow with an eternal existence of some or other.

"Monks, there are these two extinction-elements. Which two? The extinction-element with residue, and the extinction element without residue.

"And which, monks, is the extinction element with residue?

"Here, monks, a monk is an arahat, a destroyer of the cankers, one who has reached completion, done what was to be done, laid down the burden, achieved his own welfare, utterly destroyed the fetter of 'being', one who is released through comprehending rightly. His five faculties (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching) still remain: owing to their being intact he experiences what is agreeable and disagreeable, he feels what is pleasant and unpleasant. It is his destruction of lust, destruction of hate and destruction of delusion, monks, that is called the extinction element with residue.

"And which, monks, is the extinction-element without residue?

"Here, monks, a monk is an arahat . . . . . released through comprehending rightly. All of his that is felt, not being delighted in, will become cold here itself. It is this, monks, that is called the extinction-element without residue."<sup>2</sup>

1. *Itivuttaka, Dukanipata, Dutiyavagga, Sutta No. 7.*

2. *Dve'mā bhikkhave nibbānadhātuyo. Katamā dve? Saupādisesa ca nibbānadhātu anupādisesa ca nibbānadhātu.*

*Katamā ca bhikkhave saupādisesa nibbānadhātu?*

*Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu araham hoti khīnāsavo vusitavā katakaranīyo ohitabhāro anuppattasadattho parikhīnabhavaśāññojano sammadaññāvimutto. Tassa tittthanteva pañcendriyāni yesam avighātattā manāpāmanāpaṃ paccanubhoti sukhadukkham patisamvediyaeti. Tassa yo rūgakhayo, ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave saupādisesa nibbānadhātu.*

*Katamā ca bhikkhave anupādisesa nibbānadhātu?*

*Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu araham . . . . sammadaññāvimutto. Tassa idheva bhikkhave sabbavedayitāni anabhinanditāni sīti-bhavissanti Ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave anupādisesa nibbānadhātu. (Itivuttaka, Dukanipāta, Dutiyāvagga Sutta No. 7)*



Thus in three phases we have (1) five-holding-aggregates (*pañcupādānakkhandha*), (2) the five-aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*), and (3) the extinction of the five-aggregates. The first refers to the non-arāhat, the second to the arāhat, and the third to the life-ending of the arāhat. In other words, the first refers to 'my world', the second refers to 'world', and the third refers to the extinction of the 'world'. In terms of experience it would be: firstly, there is experience with subjectivity; secondly, experience with no subjectivity; and thirdly, the extinction of experience entire. Showing the lifeless body of the monk Godhika (obviously passed away as an arāhat) the Buddha told the monks: "And monks, Godhika, the son of good family, is utterly extinct with consciousness not stationed (anew)."<sup>1</sup> The same is said of the monk Vakkali in the *Samyuttanikāyaṃ III, Khandhasamyutta Theravagga, Sutta No. 5*. The phrase "with consciousness not stationed (anew)" should make things quite clear.

For anyone other than an arāhat questions concerning "after death" (*parammarāna*) are relevant for the reason that they determine anxiety. But they are not relevant for the arāhat. Regarding the non-arāhat the Suttas say: "After the break up of the body at death"—*kāyassa bheda parammarāna*.<sup>2</sup> Regarding the arāhat they say: "With the break up of the body at the laying down of life"—*kāyassa bhedājīvita pariyādāna*.<sup>3</sup> With the arāhat there is no question of death, hence no question of after death.

To the *puthujjana*, involved as he is with 'self', the question occurs: 'What will happen to me when I die?' This question determines anxiety in him; and to the extent it determines anxiety in him, the question remains a problem for him. The *sekha*, on the other hand, knows that the question is invalid for the reason that a self is presupposed, and he has the equipment

1. *Appatitthitena ca bhikkhave viññānena Godhiko kulaputto parinibbutoti.* (*Samyuttanikāya I, Mārasamyutta, Māravagga, Sutta No. 3*)

2. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 41.*

3.



by means of which he can do away with the question and the anxiety it brings with it whenever they occur. With the arahat **the question too is extinct**; the question does not occur to him at all. When, as we pointed out in Chapter X, the arahat, in this very life, is free from reckoning as matter, feeling, perception, determinations and consciousness, all questions concerning the arahat existing or not existing after death—which means all questions concerning the reckoning of the arahat in one way or another in terms of matter, feeling, etc. after this life is over—are inapplicable (*naupeti*).<sup>1</sup> This inapplicability should not—as one might perhaps be tempted to understand—be understood as hinting at some sort of eternal metaphysical existence after the arahat's life here is over. It is to be understood in precisely the sense we have explained. When the arahat's life is over, consciousness not being stationed anywhere, not uprising anywhere, all experience is utterly extinct.

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We can now deal further with Kevaddha's question and what the Buddha said to him in reply. In Chapter V we dealt with this only partially.

The question (quoted on p. 86) was, "Where indeed, Venerable One, do these four primary modes of behaviour finally cease,—that is to say, the earth-element, the water-element, the fire-element, and the air-element?"<sup>2</sup> The Buddha points out that the question is improper, and that the proper question should be:

"Where do earth, water, fire and air get no footing?  
Where do long and short, small and large, good and bad,  
Where do name and matter cease without remainder?"<sup>3</sup>

1. *Samyuttanikāya, Ayyākatasaṃyutta, Sutta No. 1.*

2. *Kattha nukho bhante ime cattāro mahābhūtā aparisesā nirujjhanti seyyathidamā, pathavīdhātu āpodhātu tejodhātu vāyodhātu? (Dighanikāya, Sutta No. 11*

3. *Kattha āpo ca pathavī tejo vāyo na gādhati?  
Kattha dīghanca rassanca anuṃ thulaṃ subhāsubhaṃ,  
Kattha nāmanca rūpanca asesam uparujjhatīti? (Ibid)*



And the answer is:

"The non-indicative consciousness, limitless, entirely given up,  
There it is where earth, water, fire and air get no footing.  
There it is where long and short, small and large, good and  
bad,

There it is where name and matter cease without remainder.  
With the ceasing of consciousness, there these cease."<sup>1</sup>

Cessation—which is the same thing as extinction or *nibbāna*—has two phases, which as we have seen is the extinction element with residue and the extinction element without residue. And these two phases apply to each one of the five aggregates of matter, perception, feeling, determinations and consciousness. Accordingly, with regard to consciousness, there is first the cessation of the consciousness pointing to an 'I' or 'self', and with which consciousness that 'I' or 'self' can be identified: 'This is mine; this am I; this is my self'. In the Buddha's answer to the question—which answer is also given in verse—the first line is: "The non-indicative consciousness, the limitless, the entirely given up." And this means: the arahat's consciousness does not indicate an 'I' or 'self'; it is no longer limited by being 'my consciousness'; and 'I' or 'mine' or 'am' (*aham ti va mamam ti va asmā ti va*)<sup>2</sup> are given up entirely. In this sense, the arahat's consciousness is said to have "ceased" (*niruddha*). Secondly, there is the cessation of the arahat's consciousness when his life comes to an end, and this can be described as the cessation of the residual non-indicative consciousness. The phrase "cessation of consciousness" (*viññānanirodho*) is used to

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1. *Viññānaṃ anidassanaṃ anantaṃ sabbato paṇaṃ*  
*Ettha āpo ca pathavī tejo vāyo na gādhati.*  
*Ettha dīghanca rassanca anuṃ thūlam subhāsubham*  
*Ettha nāmanca rūpanca asesam uparujjhatī.*  
*Viññānassa nirodheṇa etthetaṃ uparujjhatī. (Samyutta Nikāya, Ayyākata saṃ-*  
*yutta, Sutta No. 1)*

The first line of this verse is often seen translated as follows: "Invisible infinite consciousness which shines everywhere". This is simply guesswork promoted largely by the Commentaries; and one would like to know how consciousness can be 'invisible' if it 'shines everywhere'.

2. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 28.*



cover both the cessation of consciousness indicative of 'I' or 'self' and the cessation of the residual non-indicative consciousness of the arahat.

Now when in the first sense consciousness is said to have ceased, then no longer is there the four primary modes of behaviour getting a footing for an 'I' or 'self'; in other words, there is then no longer an appearing as four primary modes of behaviour for an 'I' or 'self', and with which appearance that 'I' or 'self' can be identified. This is also what is referred to as the "cessation of matter"—in Pāli, *rūpassa nirodho*<sup>1</sup> or *rūpassa attha-gamo*<sup>2</sup>—which the arahat **experiences**.

"And what, monks, is the ceasing of matter?"

"Here, monks, he does not delight in it, does not greet it, does not stand attached to it.

"And what, monks, does he not delight in, does not greet, does not stand attached to?"

"It is matter that he does not delight in, does not greet, does not stand attached to. To him not delighting in matter, not greeting it, not standing attached to it, what desire there is for matter, that ceases. With that cessation of desire, the ceasing of holding; with cessation of holding, the ceasing of 'being'; with cessation of 'being', the ceasing of birth; with cessation of birth, ageing-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, unpleasure, grief, and despair cease. Thus is the ceasing of this whole mass of *dukkha*.

This, monks, is the ceasing of matter."<sup>3</sup>

1. *Samyuttanikāya III, Khandhasamyutta, Bhāravagga, Sutta No. 9.*
2. *Samyuttanikāya III, Khandhasamyutta, Nakulapitavagga, Sutta No. 5.*
3. *Ko ca bhikkhave rūpassa atthagamo? Idha bhikkhave nābhinandati nābhivadati nājjhosāya titthati Kiñca nābhinandati nābhivadati nājjhosāya titthati? Rūpam nābhinandati nābhivadati nājjhosāya titthati. Tassa rūpam anabhinandato anabhivadato anājjhosaya titthato yā rūpe nandisā nirujjhati Tassa nandinirodhā-upādānanirodho, upādānanirodho bhavaniridho, bhavanirodhā jātinirodho, jātinirodha jarāmaṇam sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā nirujjhanti. Evametassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hoti. Ayaṃ bhikkhave rūpassa atthagamo. (Samyuttanikāya III, Khandhasamyutta, Nakulapitavagga, Sutta No. 5)*



The same is said of the other four aggregates—feeling, perception, determinations and consciousness.

In a word, the “cessation of the aggregates” (*khandhanirodho*) that the arahat experiences is the cessation of the five **holding** aggregates, which is precisely the cessation of *dukkha*.

Quite naturally, the same would apply to name-and-matter and to all the sub-divisions of the aggregates such as the concepts of long and short, large and small, etc. When they are not there for an ‘I’ or ‘self’, and likewise not there to be identified with that ‘I’ or ‘self’, they are said to have ceased.

So long as the arahat lives there are the five aggregates which form the residue, and that means there are all those things that go to make up this residue. There is still a getting a footing in existence for the four primary modes of behaviour, or there is still their appearance as four primary modes of behaviour, and he still does look upon things as long and short, large and small, etc., for loss of holding (*upādāna*) or loss of subjectivity (*asmimāna*, *asmī ti chando*) is **not** loss of point of view also, is **not** loss of the reflexive structure also.

In this context we may mention that there is a rather common notion that “the emancipated sage has no view-point”. (By ‘emancipated sage’ is meant the arahat.) But this surreptitiously mystical notion is wrong. The arahat **has** a view-point. It is the arahat’s view that this is longer than that, or that this is finer than that or that this is right and this is wrong, that this is *dukkha* and this is non-*dukkha* and so on. The view-point that the arahat **hasn’t** is ‘I’ ‘mine’ and ‘self’. In fact in the *Majjhimanikāya*, Sutta No. 117 it is said that “the arahat is possessed of ten factors” (*dasanga-samannāgato arahamhoti*), the first of which is right-view (*sammāditthi*).

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#### One other matter.

Often one comes across writers implicitly or explicitly asserting that *nibbāna*—i.e. the experience of arahatness—is something



that cannot be perceived or understood, thus making *nibbāna* an incomprehensibility or a state **mystical**. After what has so far been said it may not be necessary to point out that these are grossly mistaken assertions. The existential ambiguity has, in its very nature the tendency to lead on towards mysticism, and that is precisely why certain existentialist thinkers do go mystic. But this going mystic is simply because a surmounting of the ambiguity is not perceived. Mystification is a state pertaining to the *puthujjana*, and not the arahat who has realized *nibbāna*, who has **surmounted** the existential ambiguity. All sense of subjectivity has ceased in the arahat, and with that has ceased all numinous and mystic experiences described by mystics—the Absolute, the Divine, the true Self, the Essence, the Oneness, and all the rest of it.

The Buddha describes the arahat as “immeasurable” (*appameyyo*).<sup>1</sup> But this does not mean he is something mystic or beyond all understanding. It only means that there is nothing **to be** measured; that is to say, there is no matter, feeling, perception, determinations or consciousness identified as being ‘I’ or ‘self’, and thereby to appear as something measurable. This description “immeasurable” should be taken in the same sense as when it is said that the arahat’s consciousness has “ceased” or that “actually and in truth there is no arahat to be found.” No doubt it is not easy to see or understand all this. But the difficulty of seeing or understanding a thing should not be mistaken to mean that the thing is mystic.

Further, it is sometimes thought that the arahat’s *vijjā* was ever present even when he was not an arahat that when he was a non-arahat the defilements (*kilesa*) or the stains (*upakkilera*) merely covered up this *vijjā* not letting it become manifest and that therefore the arahat’s experience is a “return to the original nature of things.” Again this subtle resort to mysticism—which is also a subtle holding to belief in self—is far from correct, and it is allied to things like the Vedantic notion of the ever-

1. *Anguttaranikāya I, Tikanipāta, Apayikavagga, Sutta No. 3.*



present indwelling glory of the Ātman. Intimately related at bottom to such ideas is that expressed in statements of the following type: "In fact, the doctrine of soulessness opens up to mankind exalting prospects for, if there is no self, there is no bondage and, ultimately no need for liberation, for what is there to free? We are already free. Nirvāna is here and now, if we would only open our eyes!" Incidentally, this last statement further provides us with a good example of how the *puthujjana* improperly attending to things comes to the view 'There is no self for me' and so falls into difficulties. (How this view puts him into difficulties was indicated by us in Chapter VII. Note also the subtle perception of pleasurableness in the statement.) Just because there is a match-stick and a surface to strike it on, we cannot say that the flame was ever present and it was just suppressed or covered up. There must also be a striking the match, and further one must be **informed** that if he wants the flame the stick must be struck on the surface—a striking which, like the flame, is still not existent at all. In this simile the match-stick and the surface are the five-holding-aggregates, the striking is the developing the noble eightfold path, and the informer is the Buddha. Just as much as the flame was **not** there until the striking was done, *vijjā* was **not** there until the path was fully developed. You cannot have both *vijjā* and *avijjā* (at least not the arahat's *vijjā* and the *puthujjana*'s *avijjā*), one suppressed and the other manifest. When I know that a thing is good, at that **one and the same time** I cannot know that the thing is bad, though it is possible for me to **develop** my thinking (in the passage of time) to the point of knowing that it is bad; and when I know that it is bad, at that one and the same time I cannot know that it is good. The *Anguttaranikāya I, Ekanipāta, Sukavagga, Sutta No. 9*—which is a Sutta often quoted as pointing to an ever present 'luminous' mind—says: "This mind, monks, is luminous (capable of clear reflexion), and it is stained by occasional stains."<sup>1</sup> This statement constitutes this sutta in its

1. *Pabbassaramidaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ tanca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkilithanti.*



entirety. The Sutta that follows is, "This mind, monks, is luminious (capable of clear reflexion), and freed from occasional stains."<sup>1</sup> Obviously these two Suttas describe two different types of luminious minds. That by 'luminious mind' is meant a mind capable of clear reflexion is indicated in the following Sutta passage: "That mind is pliable, and workable, and luminious, and not brittle."<sup>2</sup> The Sutta that precedes the two consecutive Suttas of the *Sukavagga* we have just quoted says: "I consider not, monks, there to be any other thing that turns as swiftly, that is to say, as the mind—so much so monks, that it is difficult to illustrate how swift to turn it is."<sup>3</sup> And here too this statement constitutes this Sutta in its entirety. These Suttas which are each composed of single statements should be taken together, and they too with the other Suttas forming the Chapter (the *Sukavagga*) as a whole. That the match-stick is capable of producing a flame when struck on the surface does not permit us to assume that the flame was there hidden at all times. Likewise, that the mind is capable of producing *vijjā* when it clearly reflects does not permit us to say that *vijjā* was ever present but hidden or unnoticed. The Buddha says that as a result of his efforts before attaining Buddhahood. "Eye arose, knowledge arose, understanding arose, science arose, light arose."<sup>4</sup> These were **not** there in him earlier.

In the *Anguttaranikāya*, I. *Tikanipāta*, *Brāhamnavagga*, Sutta No. 5, in terms a thoughtful man could be persuaded to think, the Buddha points out that man intends harm to himself and or to others because of lust, hate and delusion, and that if lust, hate and delusion are abandoned he would no longer intend such;

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1. *Anguttaranikāya* I, *Ekanipāta*, *Sukavagga*, Sutta No. 10
  2. *Anguttaranikāya* I, *Tikanipāta*, *Lonaphalavagga*, Sutta No. 11.
  3. *Nāham bhikkhave aññan ekedhammaṃ samanupassāmi yaṃ evaṃ lahu-parivattaṃ yathā idam cittaṃ, yāvancidam bhikkhave upamāpi na sukarā yāva lahu-parivattaṃ cittaṃ ti.* (*Anguttaranikāya* I, *Ekanipāta*, Sutta No. 8)
  2. *Cakkhum udapādi ñānaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, ā loko udapādi.* (*Mahāvagga* I, *Pancavaggiyakathā*.)



and further, to the extent that he sees that no harm is intended when lust, hate and delusion are abandoned, to the extent *nibbāna*—which is the destruction of lust, hate and delusion—is immediately **visible**, or visible here and now (*sanditthika*). But this does not mean that, as the Pali Text Society Dictionary says, “*Nibbana* is purely and solely an **ethical** state, to be reached in this birth by ethical practices, contemplation and insight. It is therefore not transcendental.” That is making things far too simple. For, the **destruction** of lust, hate and delusion is at one and the same time the destruction of *avijjā* and *asmimāna*, which gives to the destruction of lust, hate and delusion a very much more subtle and deep a meaning. *Nibbāna* may be called an ethical state **only** in as far as the **way** to its realization, being yet involved with subjectivity, can be called an ethical practice, though it is an ethical practice unknown to and not understood by the *puthujjana* and all his schools of ethics. But inasmuch as in *nibbāna* there is no subjectivity whatsoever, *nibbāna* is the extinction of ethics, and therefore it **transcends** ethics. The arahat is like the lotus that grows up out of the mud, but having grown up out of the mud, remains untouched by the mud.

Unlike the *puthujjana* who can see the attenuation of lust, hate and delusion only at a coarse level, the *sekha* sees the destruction of lust, hate and delusion at its root-structural level, i.e. in terms of the destruction of *upādāna*, which is what, in the **proper** sense of seeing, seeing *nibbāna* is. And if that is so, what precisely is this seeing *nibbāna*? The latent tendencies to the conceits of ‘I’-making and ‘mine’-making (*ahamkāramamamkāramānānusaya*) are either manifest or not manifest, and when manifest ‘I’ and ‘mine’ have been **made** (*katam*). Now, one can **experience** the subsidence of manifest unpleasure with the subsidence of the made ‘I’ and the made ‘mine’, and see that this is actually so whilst such experience is present. In other words one can be mindful and aware that one’s experience has no unpleasure of any sort **because** no ‘I’ or ‘mine’ has been made in that experience. This experience leads one to the inevitable conclusion that if the latent **tendencies** to the conceits



not abide contacting it with his body. Even so, friend, that cessation of 'being' is *nibbāna* has been well seen as it really is by right understanding and yet I am not an arahat, a destroyer of the cankers." (*Samyutta Nikāya II, Tr. Tr. P. 186*). This vision of the *sekha*'s, unlike the coarse vision the *puthujjana* can derive, is unshakeable and beyond doubt. The *sekha* has no doubt whatsoever that if *dukkha* is to be destroyed all *upādāna* **must** be destroyed.

"Monks, were there a holding to belief in self from the holding to which there would not arise sorrow, lamentation, unpleasure, grief and despair, then maintain that holding to belief in self. But, monks, do you see that holding to belief in self from the holding to which belief in self there would not arise sorrow, lamentation, unpleasure, grief and despair?"

"No, Venerable One."

"Good, monks, neither do I consider there to be a holding to belief in self from the holding to which belief in self there would not arise sorrow, lamentation, unpleasure, grief and despair."<sup>1</sup>

The **Puthujjana** would think he is justified in asking: if feeling is completely extinct since experience is completely extinct, how could this extinction of feeling be considered something desirable or pleasant (*Sukha*)?. We have this question asked by Udāyi answered by Venerable Sāriputta in the Anguttara Nikāya IV, Navakavipāta, Mahāvagga, Sutta No. IV.

"But what herein is pleasant, friend Sāriputta, since here in there is nothing felt?"

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1. *Taṃ bhikkhave attavādupādānaṃ upādiyetha yaṃsa attavādupādānaṃ upādiyato na uppajjeyyūṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā. Passatha no tuṃhe bhikkhave taṃ attavādupādānaṃ yaṃsa attavādu pādānaṃ upādiyato na uppajjeyyūṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsāti?*  
*No hetuṃ bhante.*

*Sādhu bhikkhave. Ahaṃpi kho taṃ bhikkhave attavādupādānaṃ na samanupassāmi yaṃsa attavādupādānaṃ upādiyato na uppajjeyyūṃ sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 22)*



“Just this herein is pleasant, friend, that herein there is nothing felt”.

This means therefore that complete extinction-i.e. the extinction element without residue—is perceived as pleasant (not felt for when there is extinction there is no feeling) precisely because no feeling is felt. An objection may be raised that the Sutta quoted above does not specifically refer to the extinction element without residue (*Anupādisesa Nibbāna dhātu*) but merely to extinction (*nibbāna*). But it will be seen that the Sutta deals with progressive extinction, and that the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling is also considered pleasant. From the point of view of feeling, feeling is totally absent in both this attainment and in the extinction element without residue. And the arahat **knows** that his life reaching its end will be utter extinction. “Further, monks, the monk who is a learner understands the six faculties: the eye-faculty, the ear-faculty, the nose-faculty, the tongue-faculty, the body-faculty and the mind-faculty. He understands: these six faculties shall cease without remainder in every way and everywhere, nor shall other six faculties arise anywhere or any how” (*Samyutta Nikāya* page 230)

But then, the *puthujjana* still may ask; if consciousness is utterly extinct when the arahat’s life ceases, why cannot questions like “Does the arahat exist after death?”. “Does the arahat not exist after death?” etc. be answered in the affirmative or in the negative, simple and straight?. The reason why these questions should not be so answered is that they are based upon the fact that inasamuch as the *puthujjana* falsely assumes his life to be the existence of a self, he assumes the arahat’s life also to be the existence of a self. In the *Anguttaranikāya IV. Avyākatavagga, Sutta No. 1*, the Buddha points out that these questions are a “gone” to craving” (*tanhāgatam*), are a “gone to perceiving” (*sannāgatam*)<sup>1</sup>, are a “conceiving” (*maññitam*), are a “gone to holding” (*upādānagatam*), are a “remorse” (*vip-*

1. ‘Gone to perceiving’ (*sannāgatam*) refers to perceiving ‘I’ or ‘self’. The same applies to “conceiving” (*maññitam*) as we pointed out in Chapter IV.



*patisāra*).<sup>1</sup> And this simply means that the individual who asks these questions is holding to belief in self. Such an individual is really asking the question: What will happen to my **self** after death if I become an arahat?. But he may not be aware that this is the underlying question that is actually concerning him.

The *puthujjana* is **not** in a position to see the meaning of the arahat laying down life, for the reason that he always makes the assumption of a self; and consequently, any possible subjective absence is, for him, anxiety-determining. It is this anxiety that makes him ask these questions. Likewise, all answers to them—whether in the affirmative or in the negative—are anxiety-determining. It is again the existential ambiguity rearing its ugly head. Any direct answers to these questions, either in the affirmative or in the negative, will fall within the eternalist—view (*sassatavāda*) or within the annihilationist—view (*ucchedavāda*) or within a combination of both these views (or opinions, or beliefs). But both these views are wrong since they are both based upon the assumption of a self implicitly or explicitly. In fact, in the Sutta we quoted above it is said that asking these questions is also a “gone to view” (*ditthigatam*).<sup>2</sup>

What the *puthujjana* has to do is to **first** see and understand arahatness. When he has achieved this, and is then no longer a *puthujjana*, he will find that the extinction element without residue is the **natural sequence of the** extinction element with residue, and that questions concerning the arahat existing or otherwise after death are no longer applicable, and hence are no longer to be asked, are questions which are “of the nature not to be answered (*avyākāranadhammo*).<sup>3</sup>

1. The remorse here is due to the fact that the Teaching does not answer these questions which, because of his not understanding the Teaching, he thinks should be answered.

2. “Gone to view” (*ditthigatam*) refers to having wrong views (*micchā-ditthi*).

3. *Anguttaranikāya IV, Avyākata-vagga, Sutta No. 1.*



Incidentally, with regard to these questions, one often finds writers merely stating that "an attempt at their solution was not regarded as conducive to Enlightenment. "Though this statement is not wrong, it is, by itself, misleading for three reasons: (1) It makes things far too simple, (2) It leaves a somewhat mystic air around things. (3) It carries the subtle implication that the questions **may** be solved, only attempting to solve them is not conducive to Enlightenment. The correct position is that these questions are inapplicable. That being so, the questioner must first try to see deathlessness (*amata*), i. e. the arahat's experience, and so be a sekha, then he will **not** ask these questions, because he will then understand, that they are **invalid**, and hence that any attempt at answering them is **unjustifiable**.

On one occasion the Buddha so admonished Vacchagotta when the latter asked these questions. Vacchagotta then preclaimed that he was at a loss on this point, that he was bewildered, and what is more, that that measure of satisfaction he had had from former conversation with the Buddha—even that was lost;. At which the Buddha informed Vacchagotta that he **ought** to be at a loss, that he **ought** to be bewildered, which only means that the *puthujjana* ought to find himself confronted with a difficulty when he considers the Buddha's Teaching. "You ought to be at a loss, Vaccha, you ought to be bewildered. For, Vaccha, this Teaching is profound, difficult to see..."<sup>1</sup>.

This particular discourse to Vacchagotta is well worth a careful study. The common mistake made with this Sutta is that the extinction of the blazing fire is assumed to be likened to the laying down of the arahat's life. But the blazing fire is brought in as a simile to denote the 'person' (*sakkāya*). Just as the fire burns and exists by taking up dried leaves and sticks (*tīnakatthupādānam*), so does the 'person' exist by holding—And just as the fire will become extinct (*nibbāyeyya*) when there

1. *Alaṃ hi te Vaccha aññānāya alaṃ sammohāya. Gambhīrohāyam Vaccha dhammo daddaso. (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 72.)*



is no more taking up of dried leaves and sticks, so does the 'person' become extinct when the holding ceases.<sup>1</sup> What would remain is that which is referred to as the extinction element with residue and designated as arahat. Inasmuch as there is now no fire to go east, west, north, south or anywhere else, with regard to the arahat there being no 'person' to die all questions concerning a 'person' existing or otherwise after death are inapplicable.

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1. When the fire is extinguished (*nibbata*) no one supposes that the fire has gone into a mysterious state. Likewise, we are not to suppose that when the person (*sakkāya*) is extinguished—i.e. attained (*nibbāna*), the 'person', has attained a mysterious state. The 'person' is extinct, and what remains is arahatness; and this arahatness too will be extinct in time.



## CHAPTER XIV

### PATICCASAMUPPĀDA

In the doctrine called the *paticcasamuppāda* the Buddha gives us the structure of the arising of *dukkha* and of the ceasing of *dukkha*. The compound word *paticcasamuppāda* means **dependent-arising**, but for convenience sake we shall use the Pali word *paticcasamuppāda* when referring to dependent-arising.

The standard **formulation** or **exemplification** of *paticcasamuppāda* (dependent-arising) is as follows:

"In this being there, this is there; from the arising of this, this arises: that is to say, with nescience as condition, determinations; with determinations as condition, consciousness; with consciousness as condition, name-&-matter; with name-&-matter as condition, six bases; with six bases as condition, contact; with contact as condition, feeling; with feeling as condition, craving; with craving as condition, holding; with holding as condition 'being'; with 'being' as condition, birth; with birth as condition, ageing-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, unpleasure, grief, and despair, come into being. Thus is the arising of this whole mass of *dukkha*."<sup>1</sup>

In this not being there, this is not there; from the ceasing of this, this ceases: that is to say, with cessation of nescience ceasing of determinations; with cessation of determinations ceasing of consciousness; with cessation of consciousness, ceasing of name-& matter; with cessation of name-&-matter, ceasing of six bases; with cessation of six bases, ceasing of contact; with cessation of contact, ceasing of feeling; with cessation of feeling, ceasing of craving; with cessation of craving, ceasing of holding; with cessation of holding, ceasing of 'being'; with cessation of 'being', ceasing of birth; with cessation of birth, ageing-&-death, sorrow, lamentation, unpleasure, grief, and despair cease. Thus is the ceasing of this whole mass of *dukkha*."<sup>2</sup>

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1. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 38*

2. *Ibid.*



This formulation in the arising direction is termed "with the grain" whilst in the ceasing direction it is termed "against the grain". In Pali, this "with the grain" is termed *anuloma* whilst the "against the grain" is termed *patiloma*. It would be very convenient if we use these two Pali words—*anuloma* and *patiloma*—when referring to the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation in its two directions.

Now in the *Samyuttanikāya II, Abhisamasamyutta, Gahapativagga, Sutta No: 3*, the *paticcasamuppāda anuloma* (without the three factors of nescience, determinations and name-and-matter,) is defined as the "arising of *dukkha*" (*dukkassa samudaya*), and *paticcasamuppāda patiloma* is defined as the "ceasing of *dukkha*" (*dukkassa atthagamo*). Thus the *paticcasamuppāda anuloma* is the second noble truth whilst the *paticcasamuppāda patiloma* is the third noble truth. Therefore the *paticcasamuppāda anuloma* can be called "the truth of arising" (*samudhaya sacca*) and the *paticcasamuppāda patiloma* can be called "the truth of ceasing" (*nirodha sacca*), or as the *Samyuttanikāya II, Abhisamayasyutta, Gahapativagga Sutta No. 9* states, the *anuloma* is the "arising of the world" (*loka samudaya*) and the *patiloma* is the "ceasing of the world" (*loka nirujjha*). Therefore the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation is dealing with the difference between a *puthujjana* and an *arahat*, and the question of the *sekha* simply does not arise. The *sekha* is in between. He is looking **both** ways, to the past and the future. The past is *anuloma* (with the grain) and the future is *patiloma* (against the grain). (The *puthujjana* also looks at the past and the future. But whatever past and future he looks at, that past as well as that future are both *anuloma*.) If it is too late to include the *sekha* in the *anuloma*, it is too early to include him in the *patiloma*. It is as if he is something of both.

Now all this then means that if *paticcasamuppāda* is seen the four noble truths are also seen, since to see one truth is, as we have pointed out earlier, to see all the four. And seeing the four noble truths is just seeing the Buddha's Teaching. Thus it is said: "He who sees dependent-arising sees the Teaching:



he who sees the Teaching sees dependent-arising."<sup>1</sup>

This then points to the following situation: that is, if we have so far spoken of the four noble truths, then we have also spoken of *paticcasamuppāda*. And again if that is so, when we come to discuss the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation we will, to some extent at least, have to keep pointing to things we have already said.

Now, the Buddha explains that the *paticcasamuppāda* means 'In this being there, this is there; from the arising of this, this arises. In this not being there, this is not there; from the ceasing of this, this ceases'. This is a **structural** principle. In its simplest form it means; For B to be present, A must be present; and conversely, when A is absent, B is also absent. In the *Dīghanikāya Sutta No. 15*, the Buddha tells us how each one of the dependencies in the *paticcasamuppāda* formulations is to be understood. As an example, the dependency "with craving as condition, holding" is to be understood thus:

"With craving as condition, holding'—thus was that said. So, Ānanda, how there is 'With craving as condition, holding'—That should be known in just this manner. Were there, Ānanda, no craving whatsoever of anyone in anything—that is to say, craving for sight, craving for sound, craving for smell, craving for taste, craving for touch, craving for image—in craving not being there at all, from the ceasing of craving would holding be manifest?"

"There would not, lord."

"Therefore, Ānanda, just that is the cause, that the occasion, that the arising, that the condition of holding—that is to say, craving."

This simply tells us that there cannot be any holding whatsoever were there no craving, that when craving ceases holding also ceases, and that craving is the condition for the arising of holding. It does not tell us anything more.

The question may now arise: Could there be craving but no holding? The answer to this is just that so long as there is

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1. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 26.*



*avijjā* there is holding, and therefore there can be no situation where there could be craving but no holding. This question of whether the determination can exist without the correspondingly determined thing not existing in relation to the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation is to be solved through examination of *avijjā* which is really a negative (not-knowing), the positive manifestation of which negative is primarily the holding indicated in the root-structure of reflexive experience. This negative and its positive always go hand in hand. If one is there, the other is there.

Again, in the *Parivimansana Sutta*,<sup>1</sup> the Buddha explains how a monk reflecting on the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation should reflect. If he deals with the same dependency "With craving as condition, holding" he is advised to deal with it as follows:

"And further reflecting, he reflects: 'This holding—what is its occasion, what is its arising, in what is it born, what is its source? In what being, is there holding; in what not being, is there no holding?' He reflecting understands thus. Holding is there from the occasion craving, from the arising of craving, from the birth of craving, from the source craving. Craving being there, there is holding. Craving not being there, there is no holding."

Clearly, craving must be present, for holding to occur (*tanhā sati upādāna hoti*).<sup>2</sup> If craving is absent, then holding does not occur (*tanhā asati upādāna na hoti*).<sup>3</sup>

Quite obviously, this principle underlying the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation makes the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation a doctrine to be seen and understood in this state of things and does not in any way warrant running into past periods (such as past lives) or into future periods (such as future lives). In fact, in the *Majjhimanikāya*, *Sutta No. 38*, the Buddha having discussed the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation with the monks, asks the specific question from the monks as to whether he who knows

1. *Samyuttanikāya II, Abhisamayasaṃyutta, Dukkavagga, Sutta No. 1.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*



and sees the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation will think in terms of past and future. The monks answer in the negative.

But in spite of all this and more, the traditional interpretation of the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation—which seems to have gained firm ground as the orthodox interpretation—interprets this all important doctrine in terms of *kamma* (intentional action) and *kammavipāka* (fruit of intentional action) of three successive lives. Accordingly, in the twelve-factored formulation, nescience (*avijjā*) and determinations (*sankhāra*) are said to be *kamma* of the **previous** life, and their fruit (*vipāka*) is consciousness (*viññāna*), name-and-matter (*nāmarūpa*), six bases (*salāyatana*), contact (*phassa*) and feeling (*vedanā*) in this **present** life, whilst craving (*tanhā*), holding (*upādāna*) and ‘being’ (*bhava*) are *kamma* in this **present** life, and their fruit is birth (*jāti*), ageing-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, unpleasure, grief and despair (*jarāmarana sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsa*) in the **next** life that is to follow. This interpretation which seems to have its roots in the *Patisambhidamagga* and in the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* is expounded at length in the twelfth Chapter of the *Visud-dhimagga*.

Thus, of the twelve factors mentioned in this formulation, the first two pertain to the **previous** life, the next eight pertain to the **present** life, and the last two pertain to the **future** life that is to follow the present.

Schematically the position could be represented as follows:

Kamma of previous life	{	( 1. Nescience ( <i>avijjā</i> )
		( 2. Determinations ( <i>sankhāra</i> )
Vipāka of present life	{	( 3. Consciousness ( <i>viññāna</i> )
		( 4. Name-and-matter ( <i>nāmarūpa</i> )
		( 5. Six bases ( <i>salāyatana</i> )
		( 6. Contact ( <i>phasso</i> )
		( 7. Feeling ( <i>vedanā</i> )



# THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING AND THE AMBIGUITY OF EXISTENCE

Kamma in Present life	{	( 8. Craving ( <i>tanhā</i> )
		( 9. Holding ( <i>upādāna</i> )
		(10. 'Being' ( <i>bhava</i> )
Vipāka in next life	{	(11. Birth ( <i>jāti</i> )
		(12. Ageing - and - death, sorrow lamentation, unpleasure, grief and despair ( <i>jarāmarana sokaparideva duk- khadomanassupāyāsa</i> ).

That this interpretation is quite unsatisfactory in the matter of **seeing** or **understanding** *dukkha* and its cessation **here and now** is all too obvious.

The Buddha quite definitely states that it is wrong to hold the view that all feelings are the result of past acts. "In this, Sīvaka, those recluses and divines with such a belief, with such a view, that whatsoever pleasant or unpleasant or neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling as individual feels, all that is caused by past action—that is a going to excess in what is known by oneself, that is a going to excess in what is accepted as true in the world. Therefore, I say those recluses and divines to be wrong".<sup>1</sup> In this Sutta which seems to limit itself to bodily feeling, it is said that as far as concerns bodily feeling there are seven causes which are **not** the result of former *kamma*. Only as the eighth do we find the cause being the result of former *kamma* (*kammavipākaja vedanā*). Therefore if the traditional interpretation is right this would mean that the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation deals with certain bodily feelings only, i.e. with the *kammavipākaja vedanā* only, not with all feelings. But it is said: "Friend, pleasant and unpleasant (feeling) are dependently-crised, the Auspicious One has declared. Dependent on what? Dependent on contact."<sup>2</sup> This means

1. *Samyuttanikāya IV, Vedanāsaṃyutta, Atthasataparīyāyavagga, Sutta No. 1.*

2. *Samyuttanikāya II, Abhisamayasaṃyutta, Dasabalavagga, Sutta No. 5.*



that the dependency "dependent on contact, feeling" hold good for **all** feeling, of whatever kind it be. *Kammavipākaj vedanā* (i.e. feeling which has result of former *kamma* as the cause) is also dependent on contact. Further, that there can be no feeling without contact is a matter to be seen in every experience.

Whatever feeling that is experienced **now** is dependent upon conditions **now** existing, even though the feeling has in one way or other a relation to past action. For example; A abused B some time ago; B meets A now, and B remembering the past **now** abuses, A, thus causing A to experience unpleasure **now**. The unpleasure A **now** experiences is by virtue of A having abused B in the past. Thus A's unpleasure is *kammavipākaja* (due to result of past *kamma*): but yet it is **now** dependent upon conditions **now** existing. If **now** A has no notions of 'I' 'mine' and 'self', then A **cannot now** experience unpleasure **even though** B abuses him now by virtue of A having abused B in the past. **Present** feeling is always **structurally** dependent upon **present** conditions. So also is anything else that is presently existing: If the present conditions for present feeling are removed then present feeling is also removed. The point is that **present structural dependency** should not be mixed up with past phenomena which are presently **not** existing. In other words, **present** structure does not **presently** depend for its existence on conditions that are **past** and are now no more.

The *Suttanipāta* Verse 653 says:

"In this way the wise see action as it really is, seeing dependent-arising, understanding result of action."

This verse is sometimes taken by itself-i.e. isolated from the two verses preceeding it—and utilized to justify the three-life interpretation of the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation which, as we said earlier, interprets the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation as a doctrine of *kamma* and *kammavipāka*. But the two verses that precede this verse (i.e. the Verses 651 and 652) are as follows:

**Verse 651** "By action is one a farmer, by action a craftsman,  
By action is one a merchant, by action a servant,



**Verse 652** By action is one a thief, by action a soldier,  
By action is one a priest, by action a king."

Now if verse 653 is read **after** reading these two verses 651 & 652—which obviously is what should be done in this case the meaning of verse 653 becomes plain. It simply means that what one is **depends** upon what one does; and the **result of acting** (*kammavipāka*) **in a certain way** is that one is **known** accordingly. (Here *vipāka* is not used in the sense of the delayed result that comes from ethically significant action.) Quite plainly these verses have nothing to do with a past life or future life, and quite naturally the dependent arising mentioned therein too has nothing to do with a past or future life or with action and the delayed result that comes from such action.

If every feeling I experience now is the fruit of *kamma* in a **previous** existence, then I can have no **present** responsibility for my present feeling. If I hold the view that all my **present** feelings are the fruit of action in past lives then I will be holding to a form of predestination or determinism. And the Buddha very clearly rejects all forms of predestination or determinism. He states that to hold the belief or have the view that all feelings an individual feels are because of past action (*sabbam pubbe katahetu*) is wrong, and that for such an individual there is no purpose served by making an effort. All his present effort in such a case will be of no avail. But my experience tells me that in the present, here and now, I can determine the type of feeling I like to experience. A way out of *dukkha*, here and now, is possible precisely because everything I experience here and now is **not** the fruit of *kamma* in a past life. Irrespective of *kamma* in past lives there yet is the possibility of destroying *dukkha* here and now.

But as bad as any form of predestination or determinism that this traditional interpretation promotes, is the damage that it does to the very nature of the Buddha's Teaching. The Buddha said that the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation is immediately



visible (*sanditthiko*). He said that it is also not involving time (*akāliko*). "Monks, this Teaching is immediately visible, is not involving time, is a come-and-see, is leading on to be understood individually by the wise."<sup>1</sup> But the traditional interpretation of the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation does not make the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation immediately visible and not involving time. It cannot possibly do so when rebirth is brought into the question at the very outset. It is not everybody who sees rebirth. By seeing rebirth is meant the seeing of beings passing away here and arising there (*satta passeyya cavamāne upapajjamāno*.)<sup>2</sup> The noble disciple who sees the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation may not see rebirth. To be arahat one must fully comprehend the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation, see it throughly. If the traditional interpretation is right, then, to be arahat one must clearly see rebirth also. But the Suttas<sup>3</sup> tell us that there were arahats who did not see rebirth or even possess any psychic powers. When the traditional interpretation begins by saying that owing to the determinations of my previous existence my consciousness arose in this existence, and ends up by saying that owing to my present 'being' there comes birth into the next existence, a great part of the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation is immediately removed from being a matter of seeing here and now to being either an article of belief or a working hypothesis that is always left for future verification.

If the arising and ceasing of *dukkha* is neither a matter of mere belief nor a matter of hypothesis, but is a matter of direct experience here and now, then the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation which indicates the arising and ceasing of *dukkha* must also be a matter for immediate seeing and direct experience here and now. To interpret this doctrine in such a way that it cannot be seen here and now is really to work with a contradiction with regard to the Buddha's Teaching. There is, however, no perceivable reason for one to work with a contradiction. There are no

1. *Majjhimanikāya*, Sutta No. 38

2. *Majjhimanikāya*, Sutta No. 79

3. *Samyuttanikāya II*, *Abhisamayasaṃyutta*, *Mahāvagga*, Sutta No. 10.



contradictions in the Suttas. In them there is no doubt a want of being very specific and precise at times. For example, when the five holding aggregates are meant only the words 'five aggregates' are sometimes used; or, when *nibbāna* with residue is meant only the word *nibbāna* is used; or again, the words 'cessation of consciousness' are used to refer both to the cessation of holding-consciousness which applies to the living arahat and to the cessation of the arahat's consciousness which happens when the arahat's life comes to an end. It is really that looseness in language present in conversation. But these are not contradictions, and the keen student soon learns to spot out what precisely is being referred to. Nor do we find in the Sutta any scholastic concepts as are to be found in the Commentaries to these Suttas—concepts which only cause confusion. Nor also do we find in the Suttas any kind of mysticism. The Buddha's Teaching is something to be seen and experienced here and now. It has only one purpose behind it—to destroy *dukkha*, and it is designed to lead on towards the destruction of that *dukkha*.

The Buddha himself says that if one were to teach by referring to the past or to the future it would cause perplexity and doubt in the mind of the one who is being taught. "If I were to set forth to you, headman, the arising and the coming to an end of unpleasure by referring to past time (saying), 'thus it was in the past period', herein you would have doubt and perplexity. If, I were to set forth to you headman, the arising and the coming to an end of unpleasure by referring to future time (saying), 'so will it be in the future period', you would likewise have doubt and perplexity."<sup>1</sup> But this is precisely what the traditional three-life interpretation of the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation does. It begins by referring to past time and ends up by referring to future time, the result being doubt and perplexity. *Dukkha* and the cessation of *dukkha* has to be shown by reference to the **present** if it is to be shown **without** causing doubt and perplexity.

1. *Samyuttanikāya IV, Gāminisamyutta, Sutta No. 11*



Once there is certain knowledge of the present, the past and the future can be rightly inferred, since the nature of things is invariable. As it is now, so was it in the past, and so will it be in the future. This inferred knowledge of the past and the future from the knowledge of the present is called *anvaye ñāṇam*. "Any recluses and divines who in bygone times have thoroughly known ageing-and death, have thoroughly known the arising of ageing-and death, have thoroughly known the ceasing of ageing-and-death, have thoroughly known the path leading to the ceasing of ageing-and-death, they all of them have thoroughly known it just thus, even as I do now. And any recluses and brahmins who in the future time will thoroughly know ageing-and-death.....they all of them will thoroughly know it just thus, even as I do now. This is his inferred knowledge."<sup>1</sup>

Though the traditional interpretation of the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation is quick to bring in rebirth to explain this most important teaching of the Buddha, we find the Buddha himself showing a reluctance to discuss the subject of rebirth with anyone who does not here and now **see** rebirth. Having advised Udāyi to put aside the question of past lives and future lives he directed Udāyi's attention to the principle underlying the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation. "Udāyi, whoever could recollect a variety of former habitations, that is to say, one birth, two births.....and could recollect thus in all their mode and detail a variety of former habitations, either he could ask me a question concerning the past or I could ask him a question concerning the past; either he could turn his mind to answering my question concerning the past or I could turn my mind to answering his question concerning the past. Udāyi, whoever could with purified exalted vision, surpassing that of men, see beings dying and being born mean, excellent, comely, ugly, fortunate, unfortunate.....could comprehend beings going according to *kamma*, either he could ask me a question concerning

1. *Samyuttanikāya II, Abhisamayasaṃyutta, Kalārakkattiya Vagga, Sutta No. 3.*



the future or I could ask him a question concerning the future; either he could turn his mind to answering my question concerning the future or I could turn my mind to answering his question concerning the future. Wherefore, Udāyi, let be the past, let be the future; I will set forth to you the doctrine. That is to say: In this being there, this is there; from the arising of this, this arises. In this not being there, this is not there; from the ceasing of this, this ceases."<sup>1</sup> And this doctrine mentioned by the Buddha to Udāyi is exemplified by the Buddha himself as the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation. "Here, Ānanda, a monk knows thus: In this being there, this is there; from the arising of this, this arises. In this not being there, this is not there; from the ceasing of this, this ceases. That is to say: with neuroscience as condition, determinations; with determinations as condition, consciousness.....To that extent, Ānanda, it comes on to say that the monk is skilled in dependent-arising."<sup>2</sup>

There are other difficulties too for the traditional interpretation.

The traditional interpretation says that determination (*sankhārā*) in the context of the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation are action (*kamma*). Now, the Buddha has said that action (*kamma*) is intention (*cetanā*). So, are we to take the three kinds of determinations, viz., body-determinations (i.e. in-and-out breathing), speech-determinations (i.e. thinking and pondering) and mind-determinations (i.e. perception and feeling) as bodily, verbal and mental action (or intention)? Is this present life the result of in-and-out breathing in the last life? Is thinking and pondering verbal action? And have we to regard perception and feeling as intention when the Suttas quite definitely differentiate between them?

Then again, how does *jāti* (birth) become rebirth or birth into the **next** life? No one would say that he was **re-born**. One would say: I was born, and when I die I **will** be **re-born**. According to the traditional interpretation the word *jāti* in the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation means rebirth. But what is

1. *Majjhimanikāya Sutta No. 115*

2. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 115.*



referred to commonly by the word rebirth is, in the Suttas, termed *punabbavābhiniṭṭhā*. This *punabbhavābhiniṭṭhā* is a compound word which means "coming to be of another existence". For example: *katam paṇavuso ayatim punabbhavābhiniṭṭhā*—"How, friend, is there in the future the coming to be of another existence"<sup>1</sup>. In the following Sutta passage both *jāti* and *punabbhavābhiniṭṭhā* appear: *ayatim punabbhavābhiniṭṭhiyā sati ayatim jāti jarāmaranam sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā sambhavanti*—"In there being in the future a coming to be of existence, there are produced in the future birth, ageing-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, unpleasure, grief and despair"<sup>2</sup>.

More inadequacies of the traditional interpretation of the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation can indeed be pointed out. These are not quite necessary. For the whole point is that the Buddha has said that the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation is immediately visible (*sanditthika*) and not involving time (*akālika*). But, clearly, if the traditional interpretation is correct, **all** the twelve factors of the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation **cannot** be seen **now** since they are spread over three successive lives. Though one may **now** see consciousness, name-and-matter, six bases, contact and feeling of **this** life, one may not **now** see the *kamma* on one's **past** life, i.e., the nescience and the determinations of one's past life. Again, one may **now** see the craving, holding, 'being' of **this** life, but one may not **now** see the birth, the ageing-and-death, etc., that will result from these things in the **next** life. So that one cannot **now** see "with determinations as condition, consciousness" or "with 'being' as condition, birth". And if it said that he who sees his past life can see that the condition for his consciousness arising in the mother's womb was the determinations of his past life, then he is saying: When the determinations in my past life **ceased** there **arose** consciousness in **this** life. And that again means he is saying that the principle of the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation (at least with the dependency "with determinations as condition,

1. *Magghimanikāya Sutta* No. 43.

2. *Samyuttanikāya II, Abhisamaya samyutta, Kalarakhattiyavagga, Sutta* No. 8.



consciousness") is: with the ceasing of this, this arises. But the Buddha says that the principle of the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation is: with the ceasing of this, this ceases (*imassa nirodha idaṃ nirujjhati*). Of course, the traditional interpretation, in order to keep to the principle enunciated by the Buddha, cannot come up with the absurd theory that whilst there were determinations in the previous life there came to be consciousness in this life, for then it means that **two** lives existed at the **same** time. And bringing in the concept of a "re-linking consciousness" (*patisaṇḍhi viññāna*), which is **not** to be found in the Suttas, so as to fill any gap between ceasing there and arising here cannot help. It may be that the "evolving consciousness" (*samvattanikaṃ viññānam*)<sup>1</sup> or the *gandhabba*<sup>2</sup> referred to in the Suttas has been conceived in this fashion in the exegetical books. But whatever be the kind of consciousness, it **must** be dependent on certain conditions, on *sankhāra*, and cannot arise without the *sankhāra* also being present. In recent times we note that this *patisaṇḍhi-viññāna*, which we repeat is not to be found in the Suttas, has led to very queer theories. Perhaps the queerest one amidst them is that this *patisaṇḍhi-viññāna* hovers around for some time after death awaiting or looking for a suitable womb (like a peeping-tom?) in which it could embed itself to form a new life over again. Needless to say that this is imagination running riot. But the point is that this type of fanciful thinking is made possible by this notion of *patisaṇḍhi-viññāna*. Perhaps the propagandists of the *patisaṇḍhi-viññāna* may not be aware that this *patisaṇḍhi-viññāna* is what is implicitly identified by them as the self or soul which, in an obtrusive way, they think passes somehow or other from one life to another. In the *Majjhima Nikāya Sutta* the Buddha calls the monk Sati foolish for thinking that when someone dies consciousness passes from death and enters a womb for a new life to be formed.

There are other innovations too resorted to in order to overcome

1. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 106.*

2. *Majjhimanikāya, Sutta No. 38.*



the difficulties arising out of the three-life interpretation of the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation. One such, though common, innovation is that the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation "should be considered as a circle, and not as a chain". But the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation hasn't got to be considered either as a chain or as a circle! Nor do the Suttas tell us to consider the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation as a chain or a circle.

How misleading this traditional three-life interpretation is can be seen from the fact that as the Sutta passage quoted by us on pg. 189 shows, seeing the impermanence taught by the Buddha is seeing *paticcasamuppāda*, is seeing dependent-arising. If the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation is to be understood as embracing past, present and future lives, then an understanding of impermanence cannot be possible, other than for those who can see how a death **now** determines a **re**-birth; and this is something more complicated, than seeing past and future living. (A Buddha can see what rebirth will immediately take place if a person who **now** dies;<sup>1</sup> but others cannot.) This Sutta passage tells us that the regarding (*samanupassanā*) a thing as self in one way or another—which is the holding (*upādāna*)—is what determines being 'self' and therefore this regarding is a determination; further that this determination arises due to the presence of craving, and that this craving is due to the presence of feeling born of nescience-contact. So we have the determination called regarding a thing as self in one way or other being dependent upon four determinations, viz., nescience (*avijjā*), contact (*phassa*), feeling (*vedanā*) and craving (*tanhā*). And the Sutta tells us that each one of these four determinations which determine the determination called regarding a thing as self in one way or other are in turn impermanent, determined, dependently-arisen. Now these four determinations namely, nescience, contact, feeling, craving, are in fact four of the factors in the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation, as the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation points out that contact depends upon nescience, feeling depends upon contact, craving

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1. *Anguttaranikāya I, Sukha Vagga, Sutta No. 1.*



depends upon feeling. Then, the regarding a thing as self—which is the holding (*upādāna*)—depends upon craving as the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation again says. Thus, to see the impermanence of the holding, which is to see impermanence in its **essential** meaning, is to see *paticcasamuppāda*, i.e., to see dependent-arising. But if the traditional interpretation of the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation is right we cannot now see this impermanence, for according to this interpretation nescience (*avijjā*) was a matter of the past life and therefore it is **now** not possible to see how past nescience was impermanent, determined, dependently-arisen. Even if by means of recollection one recalls how past nescience was determination-dependent, yet it is not a vision that is at the same level of certainty as it would be if one now sees presently existing nescience as being presently determination-dependent.

If what we have so far said concerning the traditional interpretation of the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation is not recognized by one as valid objections to it then indeed no amount of argument will wean one away from this interpretation. It is, as Nānavīra Thera points out, a matter of one's fundamental attitude towards one's own existence. Is there or is there not in **this** life a problem, or rather, anxiety, that can be resolved in **this** present life?

The question of rebirth—or better, the question of “coming to be of another existence” (*punabbhavābhiniḍḍatti*)—should be kept strictly away from the **present** problem of *dukkha*. One's present *dukkha* can be solved only in the present. It is sufficient to accept on trust the Buddha's Teaching that if nescience and craving are not brought to an end in this life, rebirth **will** take place. Accepting this rebirth—which, as we shall see later on, is not the phenomenon that it is commonly thought to be—is quite another matter to mixing it up with one's present problem of *dukkha* which can be solved **only** in the present. It is this mixing these things up that is wrong; in other words, it is the seeking a solution to **present** *dukkha* in terms of past and future lives that is wrong.



The irrelevancy of the phenomenon of rebirth in the matter of understanding the *paticcasamuppāda* may bring up the question: Can the non-temporal—or better, the temporally non-sequential—interpretation of the *paticcasamuppāda*, by leaving out rebirth due to its very nature of not involving time, lead one to take up the position that one can reach the end of *dukkha* whilst **denying** the doctrine of rebirth which the Buddha set forth? If such a position is possible it would mean that one can reach the end of *dukkha* whilst assuming that the Buddha's Teaching is wrong in part; that is to say it is right in showing the end of *dukkha* but wrong in the question of what occurs after death.

We answer:

The honest man (who has no knowledge of past and future lives) must admit to himself that he does **not** know what will happen to him after death. He will also through observation, think that the structure of unpleasure in this life is most probably identical to the structure of unpleasure in the **next** life **if** there be one. Now he hears that the Buddha offers him a way by following which he can put an end to unpleasure once and for all. He now places trust in the Buddha and attempts to follow the way prescribed in order to reach the end of unpleasure. The trust he thus places in the Buddha is also dependent upon accepting the **possibility** of rebirth in the **face of his not knowing for certain** what will happen to him after death. At this stage his trust in the Buddha is shakeable, and it carries the element of doubt as a necessary part of its structure. Further, this doubt does take into its fold the doubt he has regarding the possibility of his being reborn or not. This means that one cannot genuinely follow the Buddha's Teaching—i.e., genuinely try to become a *sekha* at least—unless, at minimum, he **refrains from denying rebirth**. The man who is not all that concerned about rebirth but is disquieted by existential questions regarding himself can well follow the Buddha's Teaching. But that does not mean he **denies** rebirth. The position would then be that a man who does violence to his thinking by **forcing** himself to believe that there is no rebirth—when in truth he is **not certain** of it—is not fit to follow the Buddha's Teaching, and



will not follow it. Albert Camus was one such man inspite of all his self-observation and existential thinking. His disbelief in rebirth was obviously due to his passionately loathing the idea of survival after death. On the other hand the man who passionately believes in a self (or soul) is for similar reasons equally unfit to follow the Teaching and will not follow it. To follow the Buddha's Teaching one must be **honest** with himself. If a thing is ambiguous to him he must say that it is ambiguous to him; if he is not certain of a thing he must say that he is not certain of it. And if he is honest with himself he will have to say to himself that inspite of all his wishes and theories he is **not certain** that there is no rebirth. Such a man can well leave the question of rebirth aside for the moment and pursue the Teaching. Thoughts of rebirth have indeed to be put aside when one is practising insight in order to see and understand the structure of present *dukkha*. The *sekha* may not be **certain** of rebirth. But he **accepts** it even if as a *puthujjana* he was **neutral** about the whole thing. This is because his trust in the Buddha is now unshakeable.

The point is that there is a difference between **denying** rebirth and **refraining from denying** rebirth. The individual who denies rebirth cannot follow the Teaching, whilst the individual who refrains from denying rebirth can. So that, the sequentially non-temporal interpretation of the *paticcasamuppāda* which does not take rebirth into consideration cannot lead one to take up the position that he can follow the Buddha's Teaching in order to put an end to *dukkha* whilst categorically denying the doctrine of rebirth taught by the Buddha.

It now remains for us to see whether the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation can be seen and understood in its **entirety** in our present mode of 'being'. In other words, can **all** the dependencies be seen in one's present existential structure? However, a few comments concerning the nature of the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation before we proceed to examine each dependency in



it would be useful.

If we examine the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation, we see that each factor which is determined by a determination, is in turn the determination that determines some other factor. As an example, the determination 'for me' is dependent upon *avijjā*. Since *avijjā* is therefore something upon which some other thing depends, *avijjā* is a determination, is a *sankhāra*. Thus the whole of the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation can be called a determination-dependent formulation. Dependent-arising becomes synonymous with determination-dependent. To use the Pāli terms, *paticcasamuppāda* is synonymous with *sankhārapaccayā*. This is so for the reason that there is *paticcasamuppāda* only because there is a consciousness, and consciousness in turn is a determination-dependent.

It may be said that though the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation indicates what nescience determines, it does not indicate what determines nescience. But nescience has to be the first term for more than one reason. The Buddha is teaching with a practical purpose. That is to completely destroy *dukkha*. In the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation he indicates that the root of all *dukkha* is nescience and also how *dukkha* spring up from this nescience. "Just as in a peaked house, monks, whatever rafters there are, all are converged in the peak, all are joined at the peak, all are destroyed with the destruction of the peak, even so, monks, whatever unskilled things there are, all are converged in nescience, all are joined in nescience, all are destroyed with the destruction of nescience."<sup>1</sup> There is no difficulty in going beyond nescience and indicating a condition which determines nescience, and so add a further term to the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation. We may add the cankers as that which determines nescience. But one of those cankers is, as we pointed out in Ch. XII, nescience itself. Therefore going beyond nescience means introducing another factor

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1. *Samyuttanikāya II. Opamma Samyutta, Sutta No. 1.*



which is in essence introducing another layer of nescience and saying that dependent on nescience arises nescience, that non-knowledge is dependent upon non-knowledge of non-knowledge. Though this is correct no useful purpose can be served by it.

There are however certain formulations of the *paticcasamuppāda* where the exposition is different. One such important formulation is that given in the *Mahānidāna Sutta*<sup>1</sup> wherein the three categories called nescience, determinations and six bases—are omitted, and the last category of ageing-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, etc., has been divided into two. In this formulation the first term is name-and-form; but unlike with the first term nescience in the earlier formulation, the condition upon which name-and-form depends is also indicated. This formulation runs thus:

“With name-and-form as condition, consciousness; with consciousness as condition, name-and-form; with name-and-form, as condition contact; with contact as condition, feeling; with feeling as condition, craving; with craving as condition holding; with holding as condition, ‘being’; with ‘being’ as condition, birth; with birth as condition, ageing-and-death; with ageing-and-death as condition, sorrow, lamentation, unpleasure, grief, despair, arise. Such is the arising of this entire mass of *dukkha*.”

The reason for the variations in the formulation of the *paticcasamuppāda* is that the Buddha is applying a certain structural principle for a certain practical purpose, i.e. for the purpose of showing how *dukkha* arises and ceases. Modifications can be made to suit the occasion at hand. The factors mentioned in the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation are the fundamental categories of the sphere of living experience wherein lies the problem of *dukkha*, and wherein one must seek the way out of *dukkha* also. In any one of the dependencies described in the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation, the determination mentioned therein is the **fundamental** or **basic** determination upon which the

1. *Dīghanikāya Sutta* No. 15.



determined thing depends. For example, nescience is the fundamental determination upon which the non-*arahat*'s intention depends; or craving is the fundamental determination upon which holding depends. But in experience all the categories mentioned in the full series can be manifest in the present.

Lastly, we must point out that what follows may be less easy though perhaps more adequate than that of the three-life interpretation. In fact, in the *Dīghanikāya*, *Sutta No. 15*, an understanding of which *Sutta* seems essential if the *paticcasamuppāda* is to be understood—when Ānanda said the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation was evident and easy (*uttanakuttanako*) the Buddha warned him against saying so.

(1) "With nescience as condition, determinations"—(*avij-jāpaccayā sankhārā*).

At the innermost and essential level this means that so long as there is a trace of nescience regarding the four noble truths—in other words, so long as the four noble truths have not been thoroughly understood—the determination 'for me' is present in every experience, or that, the tendencies to the conceivings of subjectivity are present in the root-structure of every reflexive experience either manifest or not manifest.

When it comes to the question of action we see how this situation leads the *puthujjana* on. His action is always either meritorious (*puñña*) or de-meritorious (*apuñña*) or imperturbable (*āneñja*). The Buddha says: "If, monks, this individual man, who is involved in nescience, is determining a meritorious determination, consciousness has arrived at merit, if he is determining a de-meritorious determination, consciousness has arrived at de-merit; if he is determining an imperturbable determination, consciousness has arrived at imperturbability."<sup>1</sup>

This means that when the nescient *puthujjana* has determined for instance, a meritorious determination, his consciousness has been determined as a consciousness of a meritorious phenomenon. Here the word determination (*sankhāra*) is

1. *Samyuttanikāya II, Dukkha Vagga, Sutta No. 1.*



identical with intention (*cetanā*). When a meritorious intention is intended, consciousness is determined as a consciousness of a meritorious phenomenon.

Incidentally, the three-life interpretation suggests that "consciousness arrived at merit" (*puññopaga viññāna*) is "result of meritorious action" (*puññakammavipāka*). *Puñña* (merit) is certainly *kamma* (action); but the Sutta does not in anyway suggest that *puññopaga viññāna* is anything more than the consciousness of a meritorious situation.

Now, in the case of the arahat nescience has ceased. Therefore determinations have ceased since determinations depend upon nescience. But these determinations that have ceased are only the determinations that depend upon nescience and those would be all determinations connected with subjectivity or holding. And that is the "cessation of determinations" (*sankhāranirodho*) of the arahat.

The word *āneñja* which we have translated as 'imperturbable' in our Sutta passage can also be rendered as 'not shaking'. This word is however used in two distinct senses in the Suttas. In the first place it is used to refer to the four *jhānas* (mental absorptions) which are described as immaterial (*arūpa*). To abide in one of these is said to "attain to imperturbability" (*anejjappato*)<sup>1</sup>. But these are attainable by *puthujjana*, *sekha* and arahat alike. The attainment of these *jhānas* do not by itself change a *puthujjana* to *sekha* or a *sekha* to arahat. In the second place, *āneñja* refers to arahat-ness. In both cases of *āneñja* there is an 'imperturbability' or a 'not shaking-ness' but in two different senses. It is really a matter of using a word in varying context subject however to the fact that the *anejābhi sankhārā* of an arahat does not carry with it the *sankhārā* of 'for me'.

(2) "With determinations as condition, consciousness (*sankhārapaccayā viññāna*).

How this is so we have shown on Chapter VI. The experience is: there is the consciousness of the sight of a book for me. This

1. *Anguttaranikāya II, Sutta No. 190, Page 184*



consciousness depends upon the positive aspects of sight, smell, etc., plus the negative aspects (or intentions) of reading, adorning the bookshelf **together with** the negative aspect 'for me' so long as *avijjā* is present. All these aspects—the positive and the negative—are determinations (*sankhārā*) that determine the particular consciousness. That is why, in **this** context, that mixed lot of things defined in the Suttas as (1) in-and-out breathing (body-determination), (2) thinking and pondering (speech-determination), and (3) perception and feeling (mind-determination) are classified together as determination.<sup>1</sup> And if we further examine this mixed lot of things we will find that it is name-and-matter (*nāma-rupa*). So that without saying "with determination as condition, consciousness" we can as well say "with name-and-form as condition, consciousness"—*nāmarūpapaccayā viññāna*. And that is precisely how the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation of the *Dīghanikāya*, Sutta No. 15, starts.

If it is clear to an individual that consciousness is at **all** times dependent upon determinations, such an individual finds no necessity to interpret this dependency of the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation as determinations of his past life and consciousness of his present life—an interpretation which, as we have shown, is completely contrary to the principle enunciated by the Buddha himself.

Now, when determinations cease, consciousness must also cease. In the arahat all **subjective** determinations, i.e., all determinations concerning an 'I' or 'self' have ceased. And when that is so all consciousness concerning a subject has ceased. With the ceassation of these determinations, consciousness determined by such determinations also cease. And that is the "cessation of consciousness" (*viññānanirodho*) of the arahat.

As we explained on page 280 the arahat is left with a non-indicative consciousness, and this non-indicative consciousness depends upon determinations which are dependent upon science

1. See Chapter V for the definition of *sankhāra* in the context of the *paticcasamuppāda*.



(*vijjā*), or in negative terms, the arahat's non-indicative consciousness depends upon determinations which are **completely devoid** of all notions of subjectivity whatsoever. These latter determinations have further been explained by us in the context of what is meant by the arahat actually and in truth not-existing.

One other matter: when it is said "with determinations as condition, consciousness" (*sankhārapaccayā viññānaṃ*) it does not mean that the determinations are determinations **because** they are determinations.

(3) "With consciousness as condition, name-and-matter" (*viññānapaccayā nāmarūpa*).

Name-and-matter, as we have explained in Chapter VI is the appearance of matter, when matter is cognized—the word 'appearance' being used in the broad sense. There cannot be an appearance of matter unless there is a cognition of that matter. In terms of actual phenomena involved, there are (1) name (i.e., feeling, preception, contact, intention and attention) and (2) matter when there is consciousness. Unless there is consciousness there cannot be name-and-matter. And the sum total of consciousness and name-and-matter makes up experience. Further, experience being always the togetherness or the totality of consciousness and name-and-matter there is as we pointed out in Chapter VI a total either-way-simultaneity or reciprocal dependency between them. Further, it is because of this reciprocal dependency that the *paticcasamuppāda* formulation of the *Dīghanikāya*, *Sutta No. 15* starts in the manner it does: "With name-and-matter as condition, consciousness; with consciousness as condition, name-and-matter; ....."

Now if indicative consciousness, i.e., consciousness of an 'I' or 'self', has ceased then name-and-matter concerning an 'I' or 'self' must also have ceased. This is the "cessation of name-and-matter" (*nāmarūpanirodha*) of the arahat. The name-and-matter that is for the arahat is completely devoid of any aroma of subjectivity.

(4) "With name-and-matter as condition, the six bases" (*nāmarūpapaccayā salāyatana*).



In this context it should be noted that by 'six bases' (*salāyatana*) only the internal (*ajjhātika*) bases are meant. - "And what, monks, are the six bases? The base of eye, the base of ear, the base of nose, the base of tongue, the base of body and the base of mind. This, monks, is called the six bases."<sup>1</sup>

Now, "with name-and-matter as condition, the six bases" means just what, in the statement to Bāhiya, was meant by saying that when there is a 'there' (*tattha*) there is a 'here' (*idha*). When cognition takes place there occurs a **dyad** of name-and-matter (see page 111). This dyad is due to external matter and internal matter. The six bases, which are the six sense organs in this instance, are cognized **internal** matter. So that, dependent upon cognized matter **generally**, there is a cognized **particular** lump of matter designated six (sense) bases. For there to be a 'here', there must be a 'there' in which it can be there.

If now the cognition is without appropriation, without holding, then the six sense bases are also not appropriated "When, Bāhiya, you (will) not be there, then, Bāhiya, you (will) neither be here nor....."

(5) "With the six bases as condition, contact" - (*salāyatana paccayā phasso*.)

The definition given of contact in the Suttas, **vide** page 81, indicates that if contact is to be there the six bases must be there. Contact is the 'coming together' (*sangati*) of the sense base, the consciousness springing up from the sense base and the datum cognized by that consciousness. It can also be defined as 'engagement in experience'. So that there cannot be contact (*phasso*) unless there are the six (sense) bases (*salāyatana*). And as we pointed out in Chapter V, this contact is primarily between the living six sense organs and external data.

However, in the *patiggasamuppāda* formulation of the *Dīghanikāya*, *Sutta No. 15*, contact is said to be dependent upon name-

1. *Samyuttanikāya II, Buddha Vagga, Sutta No. 2.*



and-matter: "With name-and-matter as condition, contact"—*nāmarūpa paccayā phasso*. And the Buddha tells Ānanda that this is to be understood thus:

"Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those signs, those indications by which name-body is described,.....they being absent, would designation-contact be manifest in the matter-body?

.....No indeed, Lord.

.....Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those signs, those indications by which matter-body is described,.....being absent, would resistance-contact be manifest in the name-body?

.....No indeed, Lord.

.....Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those signs, those indications by which name-body and matter-body are described,.....they being absent, would either designation-contact or resistance-contact be manifest?

.....No indeed, Lord.

.....Those tokens, Ānanda, those marks, those signs, those indications by which name-and-matter is described,.....they being absent, would contact be manifest?

.....No indeed, Lord.

.....Therefore, Ananda, just this is the reason, this is the occasion, this is the arising, this is the condition of contact, that is to say name-and-matter."

In the above the separation of name (*nāma*) from matter (*rūpa*) is purely hypothetical. In experience they are inseparable. The purpose behind this hypothetical separation is to indicate the two aspects of contact (*phasso*), namely, designation (*adhivacana*) and resistance (*patigha*). And as it must, it ends up in the combination of name and matter. So that we finally get: with name-and-matter as condition, contact (=designation contact + resistance contact).

Let us however examine this situation a little more closely in order that we may understand this dependency better.



For there to be contact (*phasso*) there must be three things: for example, the eye, a datum (some matter) and eye-consciousness. The **coming together** of these three is contact (see page 82). But when these come together there is always a **specific** feeling and perception (not to mention intention). This specific-ness is the characteristic called designation (*adhivacana*). So we get 'book' 'ink' etc. Thus the contact is a "designation-contact" (*adhivacanasamphasso*) or a contact by designation. So that, there come a designation-contact in the lump of matter only because name (*nāma*) has those features such as feeling and perception; in other words, because the appearance of the matter (when the matter is cognized by the sense-organ) has those features such as feeling and perception. Thus with name (*nāma*) as condition, designation-contact.

Further, the feeling and perception must **endure**; that is, the feeling and perception must have inertia. But the inertia must also be **specific**. It must be solid or fluid, etc. Thus the contact is also an inertia-contact or a resistance-contact (*patisamphasso*), or a contact by inertia. And unless there is the contact of this inertia or resistance the particular appearance (of the lump of matter) cannot **remain** that appearance. In experience, the 'book' cannot there remain 'book', and the 'ink' cannot remain 'ink'. Now then comes a resistance—contact in the appearance or name (*nāma*) only because the matter (*rūpa*) has those features such as solid, fluid, etc., in other words because matter has patterns of inertia. Thus with matter as condition, there is resistance-contact.

Now, in experience, there is a specific-ness not only in feeling and perception but also in inertia. The 'book' not only appears as a book but also endures as a 'book'. Otherwise we cannot say 'there is experience of a book'. Thus, there is both designation-contact and resistance-contact. Now designation-contact is dependent upon name (*nāma*), and resistance-contact is dependent upon matter (*rūpa*). Therefore with name-and-matter (*nāmarūpa*) as condition, there is designation-



contact and resistance-contact. And that is the meaning of "With name-and-matter as condition, contact."

In the statement "with name-and-matter as condition, contact", the six bases are left out, and when this is done, contact (*phasso*) is described purely in terms of the aggregates. This is as it is in strict reflexion, and perhaps it is also why it is comparatively difficult to understand the conditionality of contact in this manner rather than when the six bases are brought in. When the six bases are brought in, it means that a certain amount of reasoning is present—because the eye is not directly present in a visual experience, but its presence is inferred from other experience, (e.g., tactile). In this latter case it is more reflection than reflexion. And this gives the reason why the six bases (*salāyatana*) may be omitted or included.

Experience without the external bases is conceivable, as for example, if experience were confined to just one single eye. But experience without the aggregates is not conceivable.

Now we come to the question of subjectivity without which there can be no *dukkha*. Here, just as much as there is a designation-contact and a resistance-contact of a 'book', so long as there is *avijjā*, there is in addition, designation-contact and resistance-contact of an 'I' or 'self'. Designation-contact of an 'I' or 'self' means that the specific name (*nāma*) is in addition identified as 'I' or 'self', and resistance-contact of an 'I' or 'self' means that the specific inertia is in addition identified as 'I' or 'self'. Thus with the contacting by designation and resistance the identification as 'I' or 'self' takes place. When *avijjā* has ceased, the designation-contact and resistance-contact is there but no identification whatsoever as an 'I' or 'self'. There is still a 'book' or 'ink', but **no** 'book' **for me**. This is the "cessation of contact" (*phassanirodho*) of the arahat.

(6) "With contact as condition, feeling"—(*phassapaccayā vedanā*)

We considered this situation in Chapter V. Unless there is a contact between the living sense bases and things there can neither be feeling nor perception.



Depending upon the contact of an 'I' or 'self' there is pleasurable, unpleasurable or neither-pleasurable-nor-unpleasurable feeling. Pleasurable feeling, we mentioned, is the pleasant mental feeling at the apprehension of 'I am', whilst unpleasurable feeling is the unpleasant mental feeling at the apprehension of danger to 'I am'.

If no 'I' or 'self' is contacted then neither pleasure nor unpleasure is felt or perceived. The arahat has gone beyond pleasure and unpleasure. This is the "cessation of feeling" (*vedanānirodho*) of the arahat. The feeling that the arahat experiences is the "cankerless pleasant feeling" which still depends upon contact, but not upon the contact of an 'I' or 'self'.

(7) "With feeling as condition, craving" (*vedanāpaccayā tanhā*).

We said that (See page 139) satisfaction is the satisfaction of craving, but that this satisfaction is not the appeasement of craving, rather that it is the continuation of craving.

This continuous satisfaction of craving is clearly a phenomenon that depends upon **feeling**. Now any mode of 'being' craved for implies that the mode is **felt satisfactory**. But then feeling can be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral; and how can unpleasant or neutral feeling be satisfactory (neutral feeling being unpleasant when not known)? By satisfactory, what is meant is **least unsatisfactory**. Now, when our mode of 'being' is no longer the least unpleasant, the mode of craving changes. Craving-for-'being' changes to craving-for-'unbeing'. This implies the continual (springing up) of a **tacit consciousness** with a perpetual discrimination of feeling at varying levels of generality. Without such a consciousness there wouldn't be a possibility of having alternative modes of 'being'. And this only means that there should be a repeated implicit springing up of consciousness of feeling in the matter of determining the future. In this way, craving depends upon feeling. A consciousness of feeling, however subtle it be, must be present if craving is to exist.



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Now, this feeling that is present is, other than in the arahat's case, fundamentally the pleasant or unpleasant mental feeling at the apprehension of 'I am' or danger to 'I am'. Craving is fundamentally a craving-to-be-'I'. And this craving-to-be-'I' have to be dependent upon feeling that **concerns** 'I' or 'self'. If feeling that concerns an 'I' or 'self' is absent then craving—which is essentially craving-to-be-'I'—is also absent. The arahat has no craving whatsoever since he has no notions of subjectivity whatsoever. This is the "cessation of craving" (*tanhānirodho*) of the arahat. As we said in Chapter X the intentional structure of the arahat or his exercise of preference is completely devoid of craving. But this is something that **is** very difficult to see.



## CHAPTER XV

### REBIRTH

There is nothing very much in the way of understanding to be said about rebirth. If one wishes to be certain of rebirth then one has to develop the power of been able to recollect one's past lives and see others dying and been born according to their *kamma*. "And Udāyi whoever could recollect a variety of former habitations, that is to say, one birth, two births . . . and could recollect thus in all their mode and detail a variety of former habitations, either he could ask me a question concerning the past or I could ask him a question concerning the past; either he could turn his mind to answering my question concerning the past or I could turn my mind to answering his question concerning the past. Udāyi, whoever could with purified exalted vision, surpassing that of men, see (*passeyya*) beings dying and being born mean, excellent, comely, ugly, fortunate, unfortunate . . . could comprehend (*pajaneyya*) beings going according to *kamma*, either he could ask me a question concerning the future or I could ask him a question concerning the future or either he could turn his mind to answering my question concerning the future or I could turn my mind to answering his question concerning the future. Wherefore, Udāyi, let be the past, let be the future; I will preach to you the Dhamma. That is to say: This, being, that comes to be; from the arising of this, that arises; this not being, that does not come to be; from the ceasing of this, that ceases."<sup>1</sup> And this Dhamma mentioned by the Buddha to Udāyi is defined by the Buddha himself as that which underlies the *paticcasamuppāda*. "Here, Ānanda, a monk knows thus: This being, that comes to be; from the arising of this, that arises; this not being, that does not come to be; from the ceasing of this; that ceases. That is to say: Dependent on ignorance the determinations; dependent on the determinations consciousness.... To this extent, Ānanda, it comes on to say

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1. *Majjhima Nikāya* 79.



that the monk is skilled in *paticcasamuppāda*.<sup>1</sup>

There is much talk of 'evidence' regarding rebirth; but evidence is only evidence. Evidence is not proof, not a matter of certainty. And if a man already accepting on trust from the Buddha that there will be rebirth so long as nescience and craving have not been destroyed, goes about looking for evidence regarding rebirth, is in the final analysis only wasting his time. For further evidence makes him accept rebirth. But he has already accepted rebirth. He goes looking for evidence for rebirth having already accepted rebirth. So further evidence leaves him essentially where he was. What such a man better do is to stop looking for evidence and try to understand the Teaching and lift himself on to safe ground—to *sekhābhūmi* (plane of the *sekhas*)—standing on which he is assured by the Buddha that his future lives (which are limited in number) will not be below human.

Of course, there could be individuals who will get affected by evidence regarding rebirth, and get affected even to the extent of following the Buddha's Teaching. If that is so then some good would result from such efforts at finding evidence and bringing that evidence to light. But—and this is the important point—the **seeker** after evidences is hardly benefited. **His** problem of existence remains unaffected. So that by all means seek evidence if it is thought useful, but do not neglect your own welfare.

But now we come to a discussion of this phenomenon referred to as rebirth. In the Pāli Suttas there is really no word which corresponds to the word **rebirth**. The reason is that the word 'rebirth' **implies** the **again been born of the same self**. Self is tacitly assumed in this word. But experience is not-self. That is why the question, "Who is it that is reborn?" is an **invalid** question. To ask **who** is reborn is to endow the individual before death with a self and to re-endow the newly-born individual with the **same** self. Otherwise 'who' has no

1. *Majjhima Nikāya* 115.



meaning. Thus again the invalidity of the question. But the *Milindappanna* does not understand this. And since it has to be given an answer **because** it considers it a valid question it gives the answer 'Neither he nor another' imagining that this answer is in keeping with the doctrine of not-self. But as we pointed out in Chapter II this answer contradicts the laws of thought though of course it might be good enough to satisfy the not very incisive minds. If a 'who' is accepted, then either it must be 'he' or 'not-he' i.e., it must be 'he' or 'another'. It cannot be both 'he' and not-'he'. All this confusion is simply because of the failure to realize that the question tacitly assumes a self through the word 'who'. The proper way to deal with this question is to **reject** the question. The individual before death was an individual determined by the conditions before death, and the newly born individual is an individual determined by the newly arisen conditions. It is actually *sakkāya ditthi* that promotes the question and the answer in the *Milindappanna* is an attempt to answer the question by **misunderstanding** *sakkāya ditthi* whilst imagining it does understand it. And since *sakkāya ditthi* is misunderstood the attempt at answering it is necessarily unsuccessful. As it normally happens the attempt ends up by a subtle resort to mysticism . . . . 'neither he nor yet another'.

So that, to ask the question 'who is it that is reborn' is bad enough. To answer the question is worse, for it makes confusion worse confounded. The *ditthisampanna* does not ask the question, simply because he does not take the existing individual as a self, and by extending the principle to the past and future he does not consider the past individual as a self or the future individual as a self. Māra's questions which we discussed in Chapter X it may be noted, are in line with this question 'who is it that is reborn.'

What however does the Buddha teach in this connection? He teaches that so long as a 'being' dies with nescience and craving another 'being' comes into existence. This is referred to as "coming to be of a further 'being'" (*punabbhavābhiniḥṣatti*).



Note that the description of the phenomenon provides no indication of a self passing from one life to another.

"How, friend, is then the coming to be of a further 'being' in the future?"

"By the delighting in this and this by creatures hindered by nescience and fettered by craving — thus is then the coming to be of a further 'being' in the future."

The Buddha says: "Vaccha at the time when the body is laid down, and the being arrives at a new body I say by *tanhā* and holding. Vaccha on that occasion to the being with *tanhā* there is holding."

In another Sutta the Buddha says: "Holding to six elements, monks, is there descent into the womb"<sup>1</sup> and these six elements held are, as the same Sutta tells us, the earth-element, the water-element, the fire-element, the air-element, the space-element and the consciousness-element.

In the *Majjhimanikāya*, Sutta No. 57, it is said "There is uprising of a 'being' from 'being'" (*bhūtā bhūtassa upapatti hoti*).

All this simply means that unless arahatness is reached, the 'personality' springs up in another life-form. Thus there is a 'personal' continuance which takes the form of a series of finite lives. This phenomenon is called *saṃsāra* by the Buddha. This word *saṃsāra* comes from *saṃ* plus *sarati*. *Sarati* merely means 'to flow, or to run or to course on'; and *saṃ* is only an intensifying prefix. Thus *saṃsāra* can be rendered 'coursing on', and this coursing on is what we referred to as the 'personal' continuance which takes the form of a series of finite lives.

Perhaps (we say perhaps, because it is not a matter of direct seeing for us) the safe way to understand *saṃsāra* is as follows:

The **act** of considering an experience as 'I', 'mine' and 'self' can be described as an **event**. Life, from the birth to death, would then be an unbroken series of such events. Even when the event does not occur there is still the tendency towards its

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1. Anguttara Nikāya I, Page 316.



occurrence. Now, *samsāra* can be conceived as this series of events going on with the one difference that one of the supports for this series of events is periodically laid down and another support is established. This support is matter, more precisely the internal lump of matter at the level of generality named 'body'. And inasmuch as during one life there is the **apparent sameness** — i.e., apparently the **same subject** — persisting from appearance of body to disappearance of body (birth to death), this apparent sameness continues unbroken with another body as support. The persistence of this apparent sameness permits us to say, in loose language, that the 'being' passed off from one life to another or was re-born. In the case of a human the memory of the past life seems to be dimmed during the period of nine months in the mother's womb. But in the case of those who are re-born as 'beings' where the rebirth takes place spontaneously (*opapātika*) — such as pretas, ghosts, etc. — there seems to be evidence that due to this fact of their spontaneous generation they can recall their past lives. The haunting of houses and places due to immense attachment to them while living seems to be due to this kind of birth which the Buddha points out. "There are these four kinds of birth, (a) Birth from egg (b) Viviparous birth (c) Birth from Moisture (d) Spontaneous Birth.<sup>1</sup> Further the intentional actions (*kamma*) of previous lives define the nature of the body-support (godly, human, animal, etc.) and the circumstances (wealthy, poor, healthy, etc.) into which the life with the said body support is born. These two things — the body-support and the new circumstances connected with the birth—are essentially the means through which the fruit of the intentional action of previous lives **tends** to manifest in terms of feeling (painful or otherwise).

If the series is brought to a halt then *samsāra* is brought to a halt. The arahat has brought *samsāra* to a halt. In the strict sense *samsāra* comes to a halt when arahatness is reached for the arahat cannot strictly be said to **exist**. But if we consider the

1. *Dīgha Nikāya III, Sutta No. 33.*



fact of his living, then when he lays down his body, no further life can arise. In the first sense he understands. "This is the end, there is no further 'being'".<sup>1</sup>

The word *punabbhavo* means further 'being'. *Natthi punabbhavo* means "no further 'being'". But *punabbhavo* is popularly taken to refer to rebirth, in which case *n'atthi punabbhavo* means no further rebirth. When applied to the arahat the latter interpretation is not sound enough for two reasons: (1) etymologically it is inaccurate, and (2) it does away with the subtle (*nipunam*) meaning of the arahat not-'being', and therewith the invalidity of the questions as to the arahat existing or not after death. It is said that the arahat is one who "has laid aside birth and *samsāra*"<sup>2</sup> (*jāti-samsāra pahīno*).

An important aspect of the fruit of intentional action (*kammavipāka*) which is experienced in the same life or a following life is that the fruit is **in accordance with** the intentional action. In the *Majjhimanikāya Sutta No. 136* the Buddha gives a broad analysis of the fruit of *kamma* that one can experience. In this Sutta the Buddha says that **everyone** (*sabbo*) who practises virtuous conduct in this life may **not** get a good new 'being', and likewise, everyone who practises bad conduct may not get a bad new 'being'. This, he says, is because of the various kinds of *kamma* one can do. "So, Ānanda, there is *kamma* which is ineffective impossible to speak about. There is *kamma* which is ineffective possible to speak about. There is *kamma* effective and possible to speak about. There is *kamma* effective and impossible to speak about."<sup>3</sup> Looked at from the point of view of rebirth—we shall use the word 'rebirth' to refer to the Pali word *punabbhavābhiniḍḍatti* purely because it is so much easier to handle than the phrase "coming to be of another 'being'" —the *puthujjana*'s situation is frightening. If the *puthujjana* wants to be **absolutely certain** of getting a

1. *Ayamantimā, natthi punabbhavo* (*Sutta Nipāta, Verse 502*)

2. *Majjhimanikāya Sutta 22.*

3. *Majjhimanikāya Sutta 136.*



good rebirth (i. e., human or celestial) he has no option but to become a *sekha*.

Another point concerning the fruit of *kamma* is that, apart from the five grave evil *kamma*, the fruit of *kamma* need not **necessarily** be undergone in full. The fruit of past *kamma* can be modified by new *kamma*; and it can be modified even to the extent of being very insignificant, as happened to Angulimāla. It is precisely because of this state of affairs that an end to *samsāra* can be brought about. If every *kamma* **must bring** about its particular fruit, then no end to *samsāra* is possible, and hence also no escape from *samsāra*. The arahat who has put an end to *samsāra* does not do any *kamma*. "He does not do any new *kamma*" (*so navanca kammanna karoti*). The reason is that subjectivity is extinct in the arahat, and *kamma* is intentional action conjoined with subjectivity. But while the arahat lives he experiences (not as a self) the fruit of **past** *kamma* which he performed when he was not arahat, and that too only whatever is left to be experienced. When his life is laid down the tendency for the fruit of past *kamma* to manifest has also 'burnt itself out'. If he intentionally brings life to an end—as the arahat Channa did<sup>1</sup>—before it naturally happens, then **also** the tendency gets 'burnt out' or extinguished.

*Samsāra* can really be accepted as **possible**, or rather, one really puts trust in *samsāra*, only when not-self-ness (*anattatā*) is seen; and that means only when one rightly sees the structure of one's experience. Rebirth of a self is a mysticism. All beliefs in such rebirth (as for instance is taught in *Vedanta*) are also necessarily mystic. To him who sees *anattatā*, the possibility of *samsāra* is little more than a mere belief since it has nothing to do with a self passing from one life to another. Yet he may not be **certain** that there is *samsāra* unless he has developed the power of seeing others dying and being reborn according to their *kamma*. Such a one's position—which is really the *sekha*'s position—is that he sees the possibility of *samsāra*, he sees

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1. *Majjhimanikāya Sutta* 144.



no contradiction in it; and since the Buddha (who showed him *anattatā*) confirms that there **is** *samsāra*, he **accepts** it. To the individual who can see others dying and been reborn according to their *kamma* the matter of another life after death can be a certainty, though of course he can well have wrong views regarding it such as a self or soul passing from one life to another. In fact, as stated in the *Dīghanikāya Sutta No. 1*, their very recollection of their past lives led some ascetics to believe in the eternalism of a self and were not inclined to accept the Buddha's Teaching.



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE PATH

By path (*magga*) is meant the path to the end of *dukkha*. It is the way which, if one follows or practises to completion, arahatness will be achieved. It is usually described as the noble eight-fold path for the simple reason that it constitutes eight factors. These eight are right-view (*sammāditthi*), right-thought (*sammāsaṅkappo*), right-speech (*sammāvācā*), right-action (*sammākammanto*), right-livelihood (*sammājīvo*), right-effort (*sammāvāyāmo*), right-mindfulness (*sammāsatī*), and right-concentration. (*sammāsamādhi*).

Metaphorically, the noble eight-fold path is referred to as the 'stream' (*sota*). It is the stream that flows to *nibbāna*.

"The stream, the stream, it is said, Sāriputta. But what, Sāriputta is the stream?"

"It is, venerable one, this noble eight-fold path that is the stream—that is to say, right-view, right-thought . . . . and right-concentration".<sup>1</sup>

There is also a three-fold classification of this eight-fold path as virtuous conduct (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and understanding (*paññā*). In this classification, the *Majjhimanikāya*, Sutta No. 44 tells us that virtuous conduct, comprises the three factors right-speech, right-action, right-livelihood, that concentration comprises right-effort, right-mindfulness and right-concentration, and that understanding comprises right-view and right-thought.

These eight factors are individually defined in the *Dīghanikāya*, Sutta No. 22. But a definition of each of these independently one after the other may not bring about a satisfactory understanding of the path **as a whole**. It would seem that a better

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1. Saṃyutta Nikāya V page 347



understanding of the path could be achieved rather by considering the path in the manner of the threefold classification of virtuous conduct (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and understanding (*paññā*), but, giving first precedence to the factor named right-view (*sammāditthi*).

This right-view (*sammāditthi*) falls within the category named understanding (*paññā*), and it is defined as follows:

"And what, monk, is right-view? That which is knowledge of *dukkha*, knowledge of the arising of *dukkha*, knowledge of the ceasing of *dukkha*, knowledge of the way that leads to the ceasing of *dukkha*. This, monks, is called right view"<sup>1</sup>.

**This** right-view is not there with the *puthujjana*; its acquisition makes him a *sekha*.

The word *sammāditthi* is occasionally used to merely refer to the right view regarding a certain thing as against a wrong view regarding it.<sup>2</sup> But the *sammāditthi* of the **path** is concerning the right view of (right) knowledge concerning the four noble truths and **nothing else**. This should be clearly kept in mind.

We can now proceed to consider the aspect called virtuous conduct (*sīla*). But before considering the *sīla* (for convenience sake we shall use the Pali word) of the path, it is beneficial to examine the *sīla* practised by the *puthujjana*, i. e., the *sīla* which is **not** of the path.

A *puthujjana* may adopt a set of moral values or a morality because of some reason or other such as faith in a teacher or acceptance of established values. The only reason some see for behaving well is to keep away from the police. In fact, the moral attitudes the *puthujjana* adopts are more a consequence of the necessities of action. The moralities of the *puthujjana* end up, all of them, only as provisional moralities. A real choice of morality of virtuous conduct—that is to say, a morality which is **not** provisional—is possible for him only if he has

1. Dīgha Nikāya II page 312

2. Majjhima Nikāya Sutta No. 136.



access to the truth regarding his 'being'; if not, they are only compromises of all kinds. And the *puthujjana* has **no** access to the truth of his 'being'. The 'acceptance of the guilt of existing' of thinkers like Heidegger does no more than make the best of a bad job.

The three factors—right-speech (*sammāvācā*), right-action (*sammākammanto*) and right-livelihood (*sammā-ājīvo*) — which together make up *sīla* are defined in the *Dīghanikāya Sutta* No. 22 summarily as follows:

“And what, monks, is right-speech? Abstaining from speaking untruth, abstaining from malicious speech, abstaining from harsh speech, abstaining from frivolous talk — this, monks, is called right-speech.

“And what, monks, is right-action? Abstaining from taking life, abstaining from taking what is not given, abstaining from sexual misconduct—this, monks, is called right-action.

“And what, monks, is right-livelihood? Here, monks, the noble disciple does away with wrong livelihood and lives the right-livelihood that is allowable—this, monks, is called right-livelihood.”

Still more summarily, or principally—repeat, principally—*sīla* is refraining from taking life, from taking what is not given, from sexual misconduct, from speaking untruth and from addiction to liquor and drugs.

But *sīla* **by itself** cannot lead to understanding of the Teaching or its development. If it could then all those ascetics like Alāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāma who lead such virtuous lives and went as far as to attain the high degrees of mental concentration called *jhānas* would have become *sekhas*. For one to become a *sotāpanna* (the second grade of *sekha*) one has to break the fetter called *sakkāya ditthi* ('personality view'). And *sakkāyaditthi* being a view, it can be



seen to be wrong only by **seeing** (*dassana*).<sup>1</sup> But this does not mean that *sīla* is not necessary. On the contrary *sīla* **is** necessary. But *sīla* can lead to right understanding and eventual release only given certain conditions.

Why *sīla* is necessary is: the fruit of practising *sīla* is freedom from remorse (*avippatisāro*). "Ānanda, Non-remorse is the benefit, non-remorse is the advantage of skilful virtuous conduct."<sup>2</sup>

If *sīla* is not there, i.e., if principally one indulges in killing, in taking what is not given, in sexual misconduct, in speaking untruth and in addiction to liquor and drugs, one is always pursued by remorse, the fundamental meaning of which is that that one is constantly vexed by the question, "What will happen to me?" Constantly seeing a 'self' which has the possibility of experiencing unpleasure in the future he would be vexed with the problem of having to avoid the possibility. And all that means he would be strengthening his *sakkāyaditthi* ('person'-view).

Further, this vexation, which is the result of not being of virtuous conduct, in turn leads to lack of that serenity and calm which in turn leads to lack of concentration; and lack of concentration prevents knowledge of seeing things as they really are (*yathābūthadassana*) even if the Teaching is made available to him.

"What, Venerable one, is the benefit, what is the advantage of non-remorse?"

"Gladness, Ānanda, is the benefit, gladness is the advantage of non-remorse."

The Sutta continues in this strain with the Buddha telling Ānanda the corresponding benefits. Summarized:

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1. Majjhima Nikāya, Sutta No. 2.

2. Anguttara Nikāya V, Dasaka Nipāta, Anisamsa Vagga, Sutta No. 1.



Joy . . . . . of gladness

Calm . . . . . of joy

Pleasure . . . . . of calm

Knowledge and seeing as it really is . . . . . of concentration,

Turning away and dispassion . . . . of knowledge and seeing as it really is.

Knowing and seeing of release . . . turning away and dispassion. And the Sutta ends by the Buddha telling Ānanda: "Thus it is, Ānanda, that skilful virtuous conduct gradually leads to the summit."

Now, strictly speaking, this Sutta is applicable only to the *sekha* and not to the *puthujjana*, since the latter requires more than just *sīla* to take him to release (*vimutti*). The *sīla* of the *puthujjana* can lead him to a concentration (*samādhi*) of a sort, but not to the **right**-concentration (*sammāsamādhi*) of the path. It is the *sekha*'s *sīla* which, when it is based upon or preceded by the right-view (*sammāditthi pubbiya*) of the path, that leads to right-concentration. This *sīla* of the path is called the "virtuous conduct pleasing to the noble" (*āriyakanta sīla*)<sup>1</sup> and has to be clearly distinguished from the *puthujjana*'s *sīla* however much they may outwardly appear to be the same.

What concentration (*samādhi*) the *puthujjana* may achieve is not the right-concentration (*sammāsamādhi*) of the path. His concentration is a not-noble concentration, i.e. a non-*āriyasamādhi*. But of course, even to achieve this concentration the *puthujjana* should observe *sīla* and be free from remorse.

Quite often one finds priorities mixed up; that is to say, one finds the importance of *sīla* for the purpose of reaching the path overestimated to the extent of assuming that unless *sīla* **has first been** perfected no understanding of the four noble truths is possible in order to reach the path.

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<sup>1</sup> Dīgha Nikāya III, page 227.



(If by *sīla* is meant only keeping to the five precepts, i.e. not to kill, not to take what is not given, not to engage in untrue speech, not to engage in sexual misconduct and not to take intoxicants and drugs-this view could be a complacent view, a sort of easy slow process to *nibbāna*). But this assumption is completely wrong. The Suttas record enough instances of individuals who were by no means perfect in *sīla* becoming *sotāpannas* after listening to the Buddha for the first time. On the other hand the importance of *sīla* must not be underestimated.

We can examine in some detail the *sīla* of the path, i.e. the sum total of the right-action, right-speech and right-livelihood of the path. As we said earlier the entire observance is based upon right-view. It is given in detail in the Majjima Nikāya, Sutta No. 27 and can in a phrase be defined as the **restraint of the senses based upon right-view.**